World

British hospitals on 'war footing'

Medical centres face staff shortage caused by a massive wave of Omicron infections. >17

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Jan 6 – Jan 12

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Prices of some greens up by 40% in flood aftermath

On average, the prices of most vegetables have been increasing due to supplies having taken a hit and other issues related to the deluge. >5

Legal issue arises

In a bid to clear his name of graft allegations, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission chief commissioner says his brother bought shares using his trading account. However, the legality of such a proxy move is being questioned. **>See reports on pages 2, 3 and 4**

"As this is a serious matter, even the rakyat want to know about it, including those at the grassroots level."

Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang
The Anti-Corruption Advisory Board chairman

"I had made known to my bosses about the shares transactions back in 2015 and I didn't see it as an issue as he is my brother."

Tan Sri Azam Baki
MACC chief commissioner

IZZRAFIQ ALIAS/The Star

"An investigation should be conducted to find out if Azam had violated any law for allowing his brother to use his trading account to acquire the shares in 2015."

Dr Muhammad Mohan
Transparency International president

"It is incumbent upon any organisation and commissioner to give more information so that there are no lingering doubts in anyone's minds."

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VISIT…

'Attack meant to erode public trust in MACC'

PUTRAJAYA: The latest attack against him was meant to erode public trust on the anti-graft body that has been working hard in its fight against corruption, claims Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission's Tan Sri Azam Baki.

Aware of public concerns over issues involving the MACC of late, the chief commissioner acknowledged that it had somewhat stripped its work and success in curbing corruption.

He also acknowledged that the attacks against him and the commission could be due to its anti-corruption actions.

"Perhaps this is the case. We do our job and we take action against people irrespective of their positions, and this may have angered some.

"I have served the agency for 37 years and I believe that I have made my fair share of enemies as well as friends.

"Maybe there are people who don't like that we are doing our job," he said.

The session with the media yesterday kicked off with Anti-Corruption Advisory Board chairman Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang presenting an overview of its observations on MACC's activities over the past year and that Azam would be present later to address the media.

When Abu Zahar was done with his question and answer session, Azam entered the auditorium, spoke and took several questions from the press.

To a question, Azam said he did not know the true agenda behind the attack against him but believed it was an attempt to smear his name and the good name of the MACC.

He said he would also be taking legal action against those who tarnished his reputation as well as that of the commission.

When asked about the individuals whom he would take legal action against, Azam replied: "She will know soon" and did not rule out the possibility of a similar action being taken against a blog.

"I am aware and humbled that this is among the challenges that almost all MACC chief commissioners have to face.

"I hereby give my pledge and commitment to carry out the duties and responsibilities that have been entrusted to me during my tenure as the MACC chief commissioner to the best of my ability

"I will continue to lead the organisation so that it becomes a body that is professional in its actions, that is credible and of high integrity," he said.

'Internal affairs' panel to keep tabs on officers

PUTRAJAYA: A special internal affairs committee has been formed by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) to detect and investigate officers suspected of involvement in criminal activities, says Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang.

The Anti-Corruption Advisory Board chairman said MACC was currently examining all aspects of its internal standard operating procedures related to integrity as part of an improvement in those areas and to avoid any such problems.

He added that the board was also satisfied with the action taken by MACC against its own officers in a recent high profile case.

"The MACC has implemented the maximum number of actions to ensure internal control over officers such as creating the MACC Anti-Corruption Plan (2021-2025) and MACC's code of ethics and conduct as well as implementing several integrity strengthening programmes," he told the media at the commission's headquarters.

Abu Zahar also said that MACC guaranteed that it would not remain quiet on such matters.

These include monitoring any massive wealth accumulated among MACC officers, verifying the authenticity of asset declarations, conducting drug and ketum tests and viewing serious cases of high debts, as well as monitoring problematic officers as reported by the directors from divisions and states.

"In this matter, the Anti-Corruption Advisory Board will continue to monitor the latest development surrounding related issues to form a commission together with officers of high moral standing and integrity," added Abu Zahar.

The committee, he said, was also responsible for identifying weaknesses and working procedures of the commission, aside from proposals and recommendations involving the working procedures of the MACC, he said.

Advisory body was informed

No offence or conflict of interest over shares issue, claims Azam

By MAZWIN NIK ANIS and RAHIMY RAHIM
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

Watch the video TheStarTV.com

PUTRAJAYA: Tan Sri Azam Baki had informed his bosses about the shares transactions back in 2015, while maintaining that he did not see it as an issue that his brother had used his trading account to acquire the shares.

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) chief commissioner said he gave permission to his younger brother, Nasir, to use his account for the purpose.

Azam said the shares were bought in the open market, adding that Nasir had financed the purchases himself.

"I allowed my brother to use my trading account because I didn't see it as an issue as he is my brother.

"If this is wrong, please let me know if this is actually an offence," he told a press conference here yesterday.

Finally breaking his silence over the issue, Azam said although he need not have declared the shares trading as it was not done by him, he had informed his superiors.

"I took the initiative to inform my superiors back then. I informed them what was going on and that I did not have any interest in the acquired shares," he said, adding that his superiors were satisfied with the explanation given.

Allegations recently surfaced that Azam owned a substantial number of shares in Gets Global Bhd as well as Excel Force MSC Bhd between 2015 and 2016 when he was the MACC director of investigations.

He said he did not come forward to offer an explanation because he felt he had not committed any offence.

However, he added that he did explain the matter to the MACC advisory board, which had summoned him on Nov 24 last year.

In the forefront: Azam taking the stage to address the media at MACC's headquarters in Putrajaya. – Bernama

"As the chief commissioner of MACC, I am answerable to the advisory board," he said.

He maintained that he did not commit any wrongdoing nor was there a conflict of interest on his part.

"The shares of the companies which my brother had purchased were not involved in any investigations carried out by the MACC.

"All the shares had since been transferred to my brother's own trading account," he added.

WEATHER

	GEORGE TOWN	K. LUMPUR	JOHOR BARU	KOTA BARU	K. KINABALU	KUCHING
AM	No rain	No rain	No rain	No rain	No rain	Rain
PM	Thunderstorms	Thunderstorms	Thunderstorms	No rain	Isolated thunderstorms	Isolated thunderstorms

PRAYER TIMES

ALOR SETAR		PENANG		K. LUMPUR		JOHOR BARU		KUANTAN		KOTA BARU	
Subuh	6:18	Subuh	6:17	Subuh	6:09	Subuh	5:57	Subuh	6:02	Subuh	6:10
Zohor	1:27	Zohor	1:27	Zohor	1:22	Zohor	1:13	Zohor	1:16	Zohor	1:19
Asar	4:48	Asar	4:49	Asar	4:44	Asar	4:37	Asar	4:39	Asar	4:40
Maghrib	7:19	Maghrib	7:20	Maghrib	7:19	Maghrib	7:13	Maghrib	7:14	Maghrib	7:12
Isyak	8:33	Isyak	8:35	Isyak	8:33	Isyak	8:27	Isyak	8:28	Isyak	8:22

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Is proxy trading allowed?

Many have been doing it, but it is a violation punishable by a fine or jail term

By GANESHWARAN KANA
ganeshwaran@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: Questions are being raised on whether it is legal for a person to use his account to buy shares on behalf of his relatives or acquaintances.

It is an open secret that many individuals have been trading shares on Bursa Malaysia via "proxies".

Individuals can use proxy accounts to trade shares in order to hide their wealth or engage in insider trading, among other reasons.

However, such action may be in breach of Section 25(4) of the Securities Industry (Central Depositories) Act 1991.

The Act provides that any securities account opened must be in the name of the beneficial owner or authorised nominee.

Violation of Section 25 may result in a person being fined not exceeding RM3mil or an imprisonment of not more than 10 years, or both.

It is noteworthy that the Securities Commission Malaysia (SC) has been clamping down on breaches of Section 25(4), although it is unclear how many individuals have been charged to date.

In May 2011, an individual was fined RM25,000 for allowing another person to use her central depository system (CDS) account at Arab-Malaysian Securities Sdn Bhd, now known as AmInvestment Bank Bhd.

The account was used to trade in Nexnews Bhd shares for the period between May 7, 2007, and May 10, 2007.

The individual was found guilty of breaching Section 25(4) of the Securities Industry (Central Depositories) Act 1991.

The practice of using proxy accounts is also found in other countries, and the respective market regulators have taken actions against such practices.

For example, the Securities and Exchange Board of India has banned a stockbroking firm's dealer and five associates in 2020 for using "mule" or proxy accounts to engage in a front running operation.

Front running is the act of illegally buying or selling of shares ahead of a substantial order by a client of a broking firm.

There have been cases of stock manipulation overseas when mule or proxy accounts were used.

Abu Zahar: Up to PM to decide on Azam's case

By MAZWIN NIK ANIS and RAHIMY RAHIM
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

Q & A time: Abu Zahar answering a question from the media at the press conference at MACC headquarters. – IZZRAFIQ ALIAS/ The Star

PUTRAJAYA: The Anti-Corruption Advisory Board will present its finding on the issue of purchased shares linked to the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) chief to the Prime Minister, says its chairman.

Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang believed the issue was of utmost importance as it was of public interest.

"I will convey this to the Prime Minister and it will be up to his discretion on what he wants to do next," he said during the highly-anticipated press conference at the MACC headquarters yesterday.

Abu Zahar was asked to comment whether he was prepared to inform the Prime Minister following calls – especially from the Opposition – to clarify the matter.

"I think this is a serious matter and even the rakyat want to know about it, including those at the grassroots level," he added.

He also hoped the matter would not be politicised.

Abu Zahar said it was, however, unnecessary to form a Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) to probe the matter, adding that this could be settled without having to form an RCI, which would cost a lot of money.

"This is a simple matter, as one side says this, while we say another. So, it is up to the rakyat to decide what the real situation is," he added.

Earlier, Abu Zahar revealed that there was no pecuniary interest or conflict of interest on the part of MACC chief Tan Sri Azam Baki over the issue of acquiring shares of two companies in 2015.

Abu Zahar said this was because the MACC chief commissioner did not purchase the shares himself as it was done by his younger brother, Nasir.

The board, he said, had called for a meeting on Nov 24 last year and had summoned Azam to explain the allegations.

"In the meeting, Tan Sri Azam explained to me and the rest of the board members that his brother had used his (Azam's) share trading account to acquire the shares in 2015.

"The shares were bought in the open market and there is no conflict of interest there," he said.

The board was also told that the shares had been transferred to Nasir's own trading account later the same year.

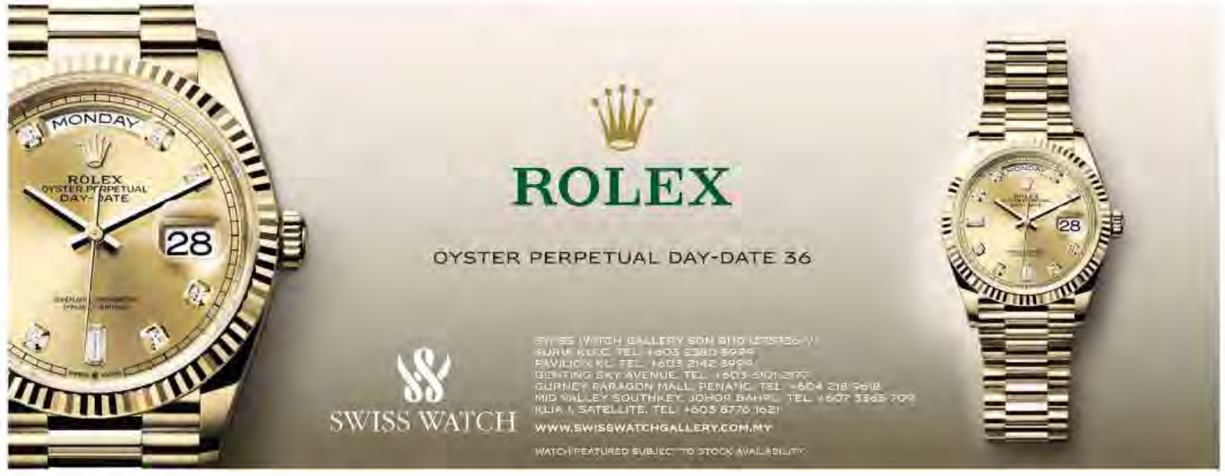
"After a lengthy discussion, the board members are of the opinion that Tan Sri Azam did not have any pecuniary interest on the said shares.

"The board is satisfied with the explanation given and found that there is no criminal conduct or conflict of interest on the part of Tan Sri Azam on this matter," said Abu Zahar.

He said the board had wanted to make public its findings pertaining to the case.

"Unfortunately, the matter was brought earlier to the public's attention by former MACC panel member Dr Edmund Terence Gomez," he said.

Allegations had surfaced that Azam owned a substantial amount of shares in Gets Global Bhd as well as Excel Force MSC Bhd between 2015 and 2016, when he was the MACC director of investigations.



PM to ensure all quarters do level best to smoothen aid distribution

KUALA LUMPUR: All the relevant agencies have been directed to do their level best to smoothen the distribution of government aid following the recent massive floods, according to Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob.

The Prime Minister said all aid that had been announced must be distributed to the affected victims as soon as possible.

"I would also like to remind all members of the Cabinet that everyone has a role to play in facing the health and economic crises as well as the disaster currently plaguing the nation.

"I strongly believe that with focus and dedication given by all quarters, we will be able to sail through these challenges steadily as a Malaysian Family," the Prime Minister said in his latest posting on Facebook.

Ismail Sabri said these challenges were among the issues discussed at this year's first Cabinet meeting which he chaired yesterday.

Among the issues given emphasis at the meeting were flood and post-flood management, as well as the suspension of umrah travel following the spread of the Omicron variant.

The Prime Minister also tweeted that to date, 36,087 or 76% of heads of households affected by floods had received compassionate aid of RM1,000.

The distribution of the aid began on Dec 27, just 10 days after the unexpected massive floods that hit several states including Selangor, Pahang and Negri Sembilan. — Bernama

In the court of public opinion

MACC must work harder to preserve integrity, say groups

By ASHLEY TANG
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has to do more to quell doubts about its integrity, say civil society groups.

Transparency International president Muhammad Mohan said that when MACC chief commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki explained that his brother used his trading account to acquire the shares in 2015, an investigation should have been conducted to find out if he had violated any laws.

He said the public and civil society looked to the MACC as the guardian and final defence against corruption.

As such, corruption allegations would create a "trust deficit".

Muhammad said improving public opinion would still be very difficult as the issue had been circulating on social media for more than a month.

He pointed out that the MACC should have acted much earlier as the long silence gave a bad impression.

"I don't think today's press conference has helped in any way. There is more work to be done for the MACC to improve its image," he said when contacted yesterday.

Muhammad added that it would also be good if the MACC or the Anti-Corruption Advisory Board spoke to Prof Dr Edmund Terence Gomez, who resigned from the MACC Consultation and Corruption Prevention Panel in protest over the panel's inaction with regard to allegations against Azam.

"The public will ask how you formed an opinion based on one side of the story. But I think we also have to be fair to Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang, the chairman of the advisory board, as he said Gomez could still provide him with the evidence and that he would not compromise on integrity or wrongdoings.

"So, I think the door is still open for Gomez since he claims that he has the evidence," he said.

Alternatively, Muhammad said, if Gomez does not trust the advisory board anymore, he could lodge a police report on the matter by providing all the evidence.

"This is up to Gomez to take it further from here," he said.

Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) commissioner Jerald Joseph said it was incumbent upon any organisation and commissioner to give more information so that there were no lingering doubts in anyone's minds.

He said the explanation given made for a "good start but it was still very little".

"I am glad today is a start for some explanation, but there is still a long way to go. The more we get, the better it is so that these allegations can be stopped or corrected if it is wrong or proven by either party.

"There is nothing wrong with answering the public, NGO or anyone's queries out there. The more you answer, the more your credibility grows," he said.

Jerald noted that accountability was the cornerstone of why the MACC existed.

"It is to make the country more accountable, so I think the leaders will need to answer any allegations against them.

"It is tough because the chief commissioner may feel that it is not fair to him, but the only way to counter whatever information that is thrown against him is with more information and answers," he said.

Jerald said public servants had clear protocols for asset declaration and positions held in private companies, among others, adding that due process for this must be followed.

Malaysia Corruption Watch president Jais Abdul Karim applauded Azam for giving his explanation and said he had carried out his responsibility well.

"We believe there are some parties out to get him. They are even prepared to stab him in the back. This is part and parcel of being the MACC chief.

"We hope the MACC is prepared for bigger 'attacks' as it is going against those who are corrupt," said Jais.

Bersih president Thomas Fann said it was of public interest that the integrity of the MACC chief be above reproach and any suspicious wealth fully investigated, and raised by concerned citizens such as Gomez.

"The MACC advisory board cleared Azam based on his own explanation, without thorough independent investigation or any evidence.

"The integrity of the MACC, and now the whole advisory board, is still in doubt. When it comes to corruption, no effort should be spared to gain public confidence in the national anti-corruption body," he said.

Muhammad: 'The public and civil society look to the MACC as the final defence against coruption.'

Jerald: 'The more questions you answer, the more your credibility will grow.'

Jais: 'Personal attacks and accusations are part and parcel of being the MACC chief.'

Police want 785 boats to aid flood response

KUALA LUMPUR: Police will request 785 boats in order to equip district police headquarters nationwide for flood response.

Federal Internal Security and Public Order Department director Comm Datuk Hazani Ghazali said they would suggest to the government that five boats be acquired for each of the 157 district police headquarters nationwide.

"These boats will act as a quick response measure should flooding occur within their jurisdiction," he told reporters yesterday.

Comm Hazani added that floods had claimed 54 victims nationwide while two others were still missing.

Selangor recorded 25 deaths followed by 21 deaths in Pahang, Kelantan (four), Sabah (three) and Negri Sembilan (one).

"The two missing victims were reported in Pahang," he said.

On the current flood situation, Comm Hazani said 3,989 families involving 13,322 people had been affected in seven states.

"As at noon on Wednesday, 172 evacuation centres are active in these seven states," he said.

"A total of 6,042 police personnel have been deployed for flood operations, including Internal Security and Public Order Department elements such as the Air Wing Unit, General Operations Forces, Marine Police and Federal Reserve Unit."

On the situation in Segamat, Comm Hazani said four villages had been completely cut off due to rising waters there.

"We have placed a police Eurocopter AS355 Squirrel to help deliver basic amenities to the people stranded in these villages," he added.

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Close encounter of a different kind for MCA's Crisis Relief Squad

By RSN MURALI
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MELAKA: Volunteers from the Crisis Relief Squad of MCA (CRSM) have had to deal with slithering reptiles, pests and vermin in homes and vehicles when helping out in the aftermath of the floods.

State CRSM chief Yong Fun Juan said there had been cases where cars were damaged by animals taking shelter inside during the floods.

"One car owner in Merlimau had to have his vehicle towed after rats damaged the wiring.

"Some of my volunteers encountered monitor lizards while cleaning the homes of flood victims," he said in an interview.

Yong said his team had also been overwhelmed by the task of rescuing pets in flood-hit areas.

However, he said pet rescue was part of the emergency action plan outlined last year to prepare for the rainy season.

Yong said the plan was augmented based on CRSM's experience dealing with such incidents.

"We also have a list of flood-prone areas where our volunteers can respond promptly upon being alerted," he said.

Yong added that they had enough volunteers to be mobilised across the state.

"Maintaining communication with the local authorities is also a priority for us when reaching out to victims.

"We have prepared our logistics to promptly respond to a wide range of scenarios including providing enough dry food supplies to evacuees," he said.

Separately, 50 volunteers from Universiti Teknikal Melaka have been sent to help with clean-up work in Mentakab, Pahang, and Gemenceh, Negri Sembilan.

Working hard: CRSM volunteers cleaning up a home in the aftermath of the Melaka flood.

Prices of some greens up

More than a 40% increase blamed on recent floods

By R. SEKARAN
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GEORGE TOWN: After more than two weeks of floods in many parts of the country, vegetable supplies have taken a hit with prices of some greens going up by more than 40% owing to damaged crops and farmland, in addition to difficulties in distribution.

A check here showed that these price spikes only affect perishables, while prices of other grocery items remain stable.

At Chowrasta and Ayer Itam markets, brinjal, leek and cabbage were among the greens with the highest price hikes, more than 40% compared with three weeks ago.

"In fact, the prices have now stabilised compared with the height of the floods on Dec 18," said vegetable seller Tan Sin Soon, 60, at Chowrasta Market yesterday.

"Brinjals now sell for about RM12 a kilo compared with RM8, lettuce RM13 from RM8 per kilo and Chinese cabbage at RM6 a kilo compared to RM3.50 a kilo."

He said that at the height of the floods about three weeks ago, some vegetable prices went up by as high as 70% for a few days because downpours in Cameron Highlands had destroyed crops there.

Tan said wholesalers complained of routes being cut off by floods and lorries not being able to send out vegetables.

Daily necessity: Flood damage to some farmlands in Cameron Highlands is one of the causes for the hike in vegetable prices. — ZHAFARAN NASIB/The Star

At Ayer Itam market, brinjal was selling at RM9 a kilo.

"We expect the prices to come down in the next few weeks," said vegetable seller Yeoh Lim Poh, 55.

Penang Island Vegetable Wholesalers Association chairman Tan Ban Ben said many plots of farmland in Cameron Highlands and elsewhere that were damaged by heavy rain and small landslides would need to be rebuilt before farmers could restart planting.

"On average, the prices of most vegetables have been increasing.

"We faced a shortage of workers due to the movement control order, and we are now grappling with the floods. It will take some time before things are back to normal," he said.

Domestic Trade and Consumers Affairs Ministry Penang director Mohd Ridzuan Ab Ghapar said periodic checks did not show a major hike in food items as a whole at most markets.

"We have been monitoring the prices since the floods. While there are price hikes on several vegetables, prices overall remain stable.

"Our personnel will visit the markets again to see if there are is a trend of price increases," he said.

'Over RM3.7mil worth of aid given to flood victims'

PETALING JAYA: Over RM3.7mil worth of aid for flood victims have been contributed by agencies under the Transport Ministry so far, says Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong.

The Transport Minister said since the floods hit the country in December, over 920 volunteers including officers and rank-and-file personnel of the ministry's agencies have been mobilised to help victims of the disaster.

"At the moment, volunteers are still on the ground and are continuing efforts to help victims of the floods.

"I would like to convey much thanks and appreciation to all staff members of the agencies under the ministry for their commitment in helping the community in times of need," said Dr Wee in a Facebook post yesterday.

Dr Wee said that besides being involved with post-flood cleaning work, agencies under the ministry have also been distributing aid such as food, drinks and necessities like mattresses, pillows, blankets, children's diapers and high pressure water sprayers.

He added that furniture and electrical items have also been donated to suraus and mosques that have been affected by the floods.

"The ministry has also helped set up two temporary evacuation centres (PPS) to put up flood victims who have been displaced," said Dr Wee.

The two PPS set up by the ministry are at the Malaysian Airports Training Centre and the Malaysian Aviation Academy, both in Sepang.

The floods which started in December have displaced many people in the states of Johor, Sabah, Pahang, Negri Sembilan, Melaka and Selangor.

Drop in number of evacuees in five states

KUALA LUMPUR: The number of flood victims seeking shelter at flood relief centres (PPS) in Johor, Pahang, Negri Sembilan, Melaka and Sabah recorded a decline, while the situation was unchanged in Selangor and Terengganu.

In JOHOR, the number of flood victims in the seven affected districts dropped to 5,399 from 1,430 families as at 8am, compared with 5,923 from 1,585 families on Tuesday night.

Johor health and environment committee chairman R. Vidyananthan said this followed the closure of two PPS in Segamat, namely SK Tenang and Dewan Serbaguna MDL Kampung Paya Merah.

However, he said one more PPS was activated at Kompleks JKKK Kampung Jawa, Muar, bringing the total number of PPS opened in the state to 81.

"Segamat had the highest number of evacuees with 3,804 people, followed by Tangkak (598), Mersing (470), Muar (161), Kota Tinggi (131), Kluang (124) and Batu Pahat (111)."

Vidyananthan said the water levels at Sungai Muar in Kampung Awat and Buloh Kasap in Segamat and Sungai Kesang in Kampung Seri Maamor near Tangkak remained at the danger level.

In PAHANG, the state disaster management committee secretariat reported that a total of 1,846 flood victims were still at 32 PPS, involving the districts of Raub, Jerantut, Temerloh, Bera, Maran, Kuantan, Pekan and Rompin.

A total of 21 roads have been closed due to floods, including Jalan Pekan Sehari Kampung Awah in Maran, Jalan Triang 1 (Bera), Jalan Air Hitam (Kuantan), Jalan Kota Gelanggi (Jerantut), Jalan Belimbing-Seri Makmur (Pekan) and Jalan Ibam-Kampung Aur (Rompin).

The Irrigation and Drainage Department (DID) through its website informed that water levels at Sungai Bera and Sungai Serting in Bera and Sungai Pahang in Kuala Sungai Chini, Pekan, exceeded the danger level.

In NEGRI SEMBILAN, data on the Social Welfare Department's InfoBencana app showed that the number of flood victims in relief centres fell to 1,488 compared with 1,628 on Tuesday.

In MELAKA, the number of flood victims decreased to 1,256 people from 324 families, compared with 1,771 people from 472 families.

State Malaysian Civil Defence Force (APM) director Lt Kol (PA) Cuthbert John Martin Quadra said all victims were from 14 areas in Alor Gajah, nine in Melaka Tengah and 14 in Jasin.

In SABAH, the number of evacuees dropped to 3,385 from 3,365.

The state disaster management secretariat said all flood victims were housed at 30 PPS in six districts in the northern part and east coast of the state.

Kota Marudu had the most evacuees with 2,668 at 14 PPS, followed by Pitas (319 people), Telupid (216), Sandakan (45), Beluran (38), and Paitan (99).

In SELANGOR, the InfoBencana app stated that the number of evacuees remained unchanged at 40 in Kuala Langat district and that they were placed at Dewan Orang Ramai Kampung Kelanang and Balai Raya Majlis Pengurusan Komuniti Kampung (MPKK) Banting.

In TERENGGANU, the number of evacuees remained at 19 from five families at two centres in Kemaman this morning, according to the state disaster management secretariat. — Bernama

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New cases	Total cases	Category 1, 2	Category 3, 4 & 5	Total recovered	VACCINATED IN MALAYSIA (As at 11:59pm Jan 4, Daily figures in brackets)	TOTAL DOSES ADMINISTERED	FULLY VACCINATED
3,270	2,773,156	3,201 (97.9%)	69 (2.1%)	2,701,808 (3,195 cases)		58,303,449 (241,595)	25,628,524 (3,952)

Covid-19 infectivity rate or R-naught (Rt) by state as at Jan 4

Perlis	Kedah	Penang	Perak	Selangor	Kelantan	Terengganu	Pahang	Negri Sembilan	Melaka	Johor	Sabah	Sarawak	FT K. Lumpur	FT Putrajaya	FT Labuan
0.97	0.99	0.95	0.96	0.94	1.00	0.94	0.96	0.94	0.96	0.98	1.01	0.78	0.92	0.93	0.85

'MCO, WFH impacted health'

More people have cardiovascular disease, says doctor

KUALA LUMPUR: The work from home (WFH) ruling in various sectors during the various phases of the movement control in 2020 and 2021 has led to an "increasing number of people suffering from cardiovascular disease", according to an expert.

Consultant specialist in cardiology and internal medicine at Universiti Malaya Medical Centre Assoc Prof Dr Muhammad Dzafir Ismail said among the negative aspects of WFH was that people spent most of their time at home, which resulted in them eating "too much unhealthy food" and not exercising enough as they could not go jogging or cycling outdoors.

"During the prolonged movement control order, most Malaysians unfortunately adopted sedentary lifestyles.

"Many also felt demotivated and were mentally distressed, which led to an increase in unhealthy habits such as smoking," he told Bernama.

He did not provide any data but said that based on his observations, he had noted an "increasing number of young patients suffering from cardiovascular disease which can lead to a heart attack".

Dr Muhammad Dzafir said cardiovascular disease, including coronary artery disease (CAD), remained Malaysia's leading cause of death every year.

According to data from the Statistics Department, 23% of deaths in 2019 were caused by cardiovascular disease. Out of the medically confirmed deaths due to cardiovascular disease, 16,325 (15%) were caused by CAD.

Dr Muhammad Dzafir explained that CAD is caused by a blockage in the blood vessels of the heart, better known as coronary blood vessels.

"The process of fat deposition or atherosclerosis is the main reason why such blockage in the coronary blood vessels can happen, as the supply of oxygen that is supposed to be carried by the blood cannot reach the heart muscle area.

"This condition, also called ischemia or ischemic, will cause the heart to not function properly.

"If left untreated for a prolonged period of time, the patient will suffer a heart attack and subsequently, heart failure, which can eventually lead to death," he added.

He said CAD that prevails for a long period of time can be worsened by other risk factors for heart disease such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, an inactive lifestyle and other hereditary factors.

Signs of CAD include severe chest pain, Dr Muhammad Dzafir said.

"The pain comes and goes in waves, and you may feel something heavy in the middle or left side of the chest. The pain will sometimes be accompanied by numbness in the left arm, jaw and neck, as well as sweating, nausea and possibly vomiting.

"However, older patients, diabetics or women sometimes don't experience (severe) pain. Instead, they may experience milder pain, shortness of breath, fainting or extreme fatigue," he added.

Consultant cardiothoracic surgeon at Mahkota Medical Centre Dr Kenny Cheng said several regular surgery options for CAD are available in hospital settings, with the popular one being coronary artery bypass grafting, which involves creating new conduits to bypass blockages in the blood vessels.

97.7% of adult population fully vaxxed

KUALA LUMPUR: A total of 22,868,434 people or 97.7% of the adult population have completed their Covid-19 vaccination.

Based on the Health Ministry's CovidNow portal, 23,158,375 people or 98.9% of the group have received at least one dose of the vaccine.

For the adolescent population, 87.7% or 2,760,090 people aged between 12 and 17 have completed the vaccination, while 2,851,195 or 90.6% have been given at least one dose of the vaccine.

A total of 241,595 doses of the vaccine were dispensed on Tuesday with 2,844 doses as first dose, 3,952 as second dose and 234,799 as booster dose.

This brings the cumulative number of vaccine doses administered under the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme to 58,303,449, including 6,865,812 booster doses.

According to the ministry's GitHub portal, a total of 31 deaths due to Covid-19 were reported on Tuesday.

Selangor had the highest number with nine deaths followed by Kedah, Johor, Kelantan, Perak and Sabah with three each, Pahang and Penang (two) and one each in Kuala Lumpur, Terengganu and Negri Sembilan. — Bernama

Don't delay booster jab, M'sians reminded

By FAZLEENA AZIZ
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PETALING JAYA: As the effects of the Covid-19 vaccine wanes after several months, it is vital for people to get booster jabs, health experts have reminded.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia health economy and public health specialist deputy dean Dr Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh said people should not think twice about getting the booster shot.

"This is because of the waning immunity. If you look at the Omicron variant, which is being spread especially by those returning from the umrah, the United Kingdom or South Africa, it can evade early detection," she said yesterday.

"It sometimes doesn't show up on the test as the incubation period takes a longer time."

Dr Sharifa said this was why she agreed with the Health Ministry's decision to temporarily suspend the umrah pilgrimage with the Saudi Arabian government battling to control the Omicron spread.

She said Omicron could be spread by those who visited relatives returning from the umrah pilgrimage.

"Even after you have taken the two vaccine doses, the waning effect can still cause someone to contract (and succumb to) the disease up to Categories 3 and 4," she added.

Dr Sharifa said an effective way to curb the spread of Covid-19 would be to set up a dedicated mandatory quarantine centre for those returning home to Malaysia.

"Even with the electronic bracelet, we still don't really know how effectively the system works. One can assume it is foolproof, but the validity can only be determined by the Health Ministry," she added.

Universiti Selangor visiting professor of Environmental Health Prof Dr Jamal Hisham Hashim agreed that the unvaccinated and those who had not gotten their booster shots after six months would be especially vulnerable to Covid-19.

He said since the immunity from the second immunisation dose waned after six months, Malaysians should not postpone vaccination beyond a point, especially those aged above 60 and with chronic diseases.

"As the Rt value is approaching 1, there is a possibility that the infection rate will increase nationwide, including that of the Omicron variant, which is more infectious than the Delta variant.

"There might have been a misconception that the vaccine would accord them long-term protection after two doses. However, scientists have known all along that this would not be the case," he noted.

"We were hoping that with the global vaccination drive, the pandemic would have died down by now. Had that been the case, there would not have been a need for a booster shot.

"But vaccine distribution has been hampered globally, resulting in vaccine inequity across the globe. This has triggered the appearance of new variants like Delta and Omicron which have unfortunately prolonged the pandemic," he said.

As such, Dr Jamal said there was a need to boost immunity with a third dose so that people would remain protected against Covid-19.

He added that beyond a certain point, there was nothing more than the continuous dissemination of information and transparency about the benefits as well as risks of vaccination, adding that the benefits of vaccination overwhelmingly exceeded the risks.

But Universiti Malaya Tropical Infectious Diseases Research and Education Centre director Prof Dr Sazaly Abu Bakar is not too worried about the spread of the virus due to the country's high vaccination rate.

He said very few groups of people had yet to be vaccinated due to health issues or other reasons known to them.

Dr Sazaly said as far as children were concerned, they were not at higher risk compared to people with comorbidities.

"If you look at the Omicron variant, it is not as virulent as the Delta variant or others seen in the past.

"Most people who test positive for Omicron have mild symptoms. Some may think it is just the common flu or attribute it to the weather when they feel sick.

"The reason why it may show up much later (in terms of detection) is because there is not enough virus load. The infection level has to be high enough for you to detect it and because of the vaccination, some cannot detect it," he explained.

Dr Sazaly advocated testing as the best solution to curb the spread of the virus in the community.

People should at least do three PCR tests, especially those returning to the country, he advised.

"You test when you come back, then three days later and on the seventh day of quarantine to be absolutely sure. This is what needs to be emphasised," he added.

Meanwhile, ProtectHealth Corporation chief executive officer Datuk Dr Anas Alam Faizli said the utilisation rate last week at vaccination centres (PPV) was 74% nationwide, adding: "Once the PPV submit their reports, we will know the utilisation rate."

He also said ProtectHealth had no control over vaccination appointments or postponement as it did not manage the scheduling for MySejahtera.

On Tuesday, ProtectHealth announced that no more walk-ins would be allowed at offsite Covid-PPV for booster jabs.

Only those with appointments on their MySejahtera app would be welcomed at the centres. This move comes after reports of crowding and long queues at PPVs in the Klang Valley.

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For your own good: Health experts say that since immunity from the second Covid-19 jab wanes after six months, Malaysians should not postpone the booster shot, especially those aged above 60 and with chronic diseases. — KK SHAM/The Star

Expert: Tell doctors if you had previous side effects

PETALING JAYA: If you had suffered side effects from your previous Covid-19 vaccination shots, tell the doctor before getting your booster shot, says an epidemiologist.

Universiti Putra Malaysia medical epidemiologist Assoc Prof Dr Malina Osman said the side effects of booster shots are generally the same as those of primary shots.

But she said if an individual had experienced certain side effects from their previous jabs, it was advisable to inform the doctors prior to getting the booster vaccination.

"For Covid-19 vaccines, the common side effects include pain and swelling at the site of injection. You may also get fever, headache, muscle pain, lethargy, chills or nausea.

"Severe side effects like a rapid heart rate, swelling in throat and allergy have also been documented but are very rare," she added.

She said those who had received their booster jab should avoid strenuous activities for the next 14 days.

Commenting on the mixture of vaccine types, Dr Malina said studies had shown that the practice was safe and provided better protection against Covid-19 by increasing antibody levels.

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Not in charge of every sen

Ex-CFO denies he was in total control of 1MDB funds

By NURBAITI HAMDAN
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KUALA LUMPUR: A former chief financial officer of 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) told the High Court that he would have paid his debts if he was indeed in control of the funds of the company.

Azmi Tahir, 48, said this when he was asked about the control of the company's funds during cross-examination by defence counsel Datuk Hariharan Tara Singh in the RM2.28bil 1MDB trial involving former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday.

The 12th prosecution witness said although he was the chief financial officer (CFO), it did not mean he was in control of every single sen of the company as he was not involved in all of the transactions in 1MDB.

"If it was entirely up to me, I would definitely pay the debts," Azmi said.

Earlier, the defence suggested to Azmi that as the CFO, he was in charge of 1MDB's finances, but this was refuted by Azmi who said he was "not entirely in control".

Hariharan: Do you agree that as co-signatory and as the chief of finance in 1MDB, ultimately, you were responsible?

Azmi: I was acting under instruction. I did not make those decisions myself.

The witness agreed that he had never taken instructions pertaining to the company directly from Najib.

The court also heard from the witness that he did not know why he was not charged in court over the scandal involving the sovereign wealth fund.

Hariharan: Do you agree there are no criminal charges levelled against you?

Azmi: As far as I know, no.

Hariharan: You agree, you were the co-signatory as well as a director of a subsidiary, you were in charge of releasing the funds yet there are no criminal charges against you.

Azmi: I don't know why there is no criminal charge.

Hariharan: But your deputy (Terence Geh) was charged.

Azmi: I don't know the specifics of the charge.

The witness also said that he did not know the details of the prosecution against the company's former general counsel Jasmine Loo Ai Swan, who was charged with money laundering involving US$5.99mil (about RM25mil).

Hariharan: You confirm she was a former legal counsel for 1MDB and worked under you?

Azmi: She was the former general counsel but she didn't work under me. We worked whenever it was necessary.

Hariharan: Are you aware that Low Taek Jho was also charged?

Azmi: I heard, in general, that he was charged.

In 2018, fugitive businessman Low, better known as Jho Low, was charged multiple times in absentia in relation to 1MDB.

Geh and Loo, who are still at large, have been charged with several offences, also relating to 1MDB.

Najib, 68, is facing four charges of using his position to obtain bribes totalling RM2.28bil from 1MDB funds and 21 charges of money laundering involving the same amount.

The hearing continues today before Justice Collin Lawrence Sequerah.

Datuk among 10 arrested in forex investment scam

By AUSTIN CAMOENS
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KUALA LUMPUR: A Datuk was among 10 arrested by the police for links to a forex investment scam involving nearly RM3mil in losses.

They also seized branded watches and 6kg of gold bars valued at RM127mil.

Federal Commercial Crimes Investigation Department director Comm Datuk Mohd Kamarudin Md Din said the syndicate was crippled following a string of operations in Perak, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Melaka and Johor on Saturday.

"We arrested 10 suspects, aged between 29 and 64, comprising nine men and a woman.

"Several vehicles, documents and items which were linked to the investment scam were also seized," he told reporters yesterday.

Comm Mohd Kamarudin said investigations showed the syndicate began operations in 2018 and all those arrested acted as brokers, agents, financial managers and account holders.

"The syndicate targetted local investors and promoted investment schemes based on forex which promised between 12% and 14% returns on investments weekly.

"The investors would be told that their money would be invested by a company called GCG Asia with access given through a website to monitor their investments," he said.

"Once the syndicate had achieved its investment target, it would cut off communications with the investors and halt the operation," he said.

Comm Mohd Kamarudin said they received a total of 23 police reports so far.

"Our investigations showed the mastermind is a Datuk, in his 40s, who claimed to be a Datuk Seri.

"Checks also revealed the suspect has a Master's in business administration," he said.

The suspects have been remanded to facilitate investigations.

Comm Mohd Kamarudin urged the public to always check with the relevant authorities as well as Bank Negara before making any investment.

"The public can also cross check bank accounts and mobile phone numbers via *http://ccid.rmp.gov.my/semakmule/* to make sure the accounts are not linked to previous scams," he said.

Those with queries can call the Scam Response Centre hotline at 03-2610 1559 or 03-2610 1599.

PTAs back deferral of school opening

KUALA LUMPUR: Several parent-teacher associations (PTAs) have described the postponement of the school session for flood-affected educational institutions as the right decision.

National Parents and Teachers Association Consultative Council president Datuk Dr Mohamad Ali Hasan said the decision to postpone the opening of the school session for educational institutions used as relief centres (PPS) was appropriate to ensure the welfare and safety of flood victims.

"We need to prioritise the safety and welfare of flood victims at these schools. We do understand that students need to return to schools as soon as possible but we also need to have sympathy for those who need help," Mohamad Ali told Bernama.

Sungai Renggam Tamil National Type School board of governors chairman M. Sukumaran said the postponement would give sufficient time for affected students and families to make necessary preparations before schools reopen.

Although many of the teachers and students in the affected schools in Taman Sri Muda, Shah Alam, had made initial preparations to return to school, he said most of their books and schooling items were damaged in the floods.

Field inspection: Sahruddin (left) surveying Nazaruddin's (centre) farm in Kampung Karak Setia. — Bernama

Pineapple farmers lose RM5.4mil

BENTONG: Ninety pineapple farmers in Selangor, Pahang, Perak and Negri Sembilan have incurred losses estimated at RM5.4mil after their farms, totalling 49ha, were hit by floods.

Malaysia Pineapple Industry Board (LPNM) chairman Datuk Dr Sahruddin Jamal said board members had taken the initiative to visit the farms to see for themselves the destruction caused by the floods and also to distribute aid to these farmers.

"In Pahang alone, 39 farmers were affected by the floods and suffered losses of about RM1mil.

"We are assessing the destruction to the farms and identifying the kinds of aid needed by them.

"Besides basic necessities, other aid to be channelled through the LPNM Disaster Fund are agriculture inputs such as fungicide, pineapple seedlings and fertiliser, amounting to RM2,500 per hectare, with the aid for a maximum of four hectares," he told Bernama after visiting the home and pineapple farm of Nazaruddin Abdul Jalil in Kampung Karak Setia, here, which was affected by the recent floods.

Sahruddin said LPNM would also assist pineapple farmers whose houses were damaged by the floods through basic aid in the form of food and basic essentials under the Agriculture and Food Industries Ministry's Prihatin programme.

"LPNM will update the information received from affected farmers to their farms, homes or both," he said.

Nazaruddin, 49, said he was thankful and touched by LPNM's visit, as well as the handout of aid such as food, mats and a water jet to his family.

The father of two, who has been growing pineapple the past four years, said the floods had destroyed 30% of his 0.4ha farm.

"I also appreciate LPNM's efforts to buy the pineapples of the MD2 variety, which are still in good condition to lessen my family's burden," he said.

Flood victims dread returning to their homes in Johor

By VENESA DEVI
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MUAR: The thought of returning home to a mud-filled and damaged house has kept flood victims from any peace of mind.

"I am worried about having to face the damage to my house," said primary school teacher Johari Komari, who is now at the temporary flood relief centre (PPS) in Kampung Jawa, Lenga here.

"The thought of it makes me sad. I believe there would be tears once I look at the condition of my house," he said.

Despite feeling safe at the PPS, Johari is worried about the condition of his newly built house.

"I have been seeking refuge at this PPS since Tuesday with my wife and six children.

"So far, there have been no problems and I am also comfortable staying here as I am surrounded by my fellow villagers whom I have known for years," he said yesterday.

Johari, 57, had also sought shelter in a PPS due to floods in 2011.

"The situation in the PPS was very different 10 years ago as there was no Covid-19 then.

"The flood victims would prepare their own food – donations came from the government and non-governmental organisations – instead of the packed food now," he said.

Although housewife Rosnizawati Aziz is looking forward to going home, she dreads having to see what has become of her house.

"Nothing beats the comfort of being at home and I hope to be able to return soon. But cleaning the house and accepting the damage caused by the floods will not be easy for us," she said.

Rosnizawati, 33, moved to Muar three years ago after getting married.

"This is the first time I have had to go through a flood," she said.

As at noon yesterday, the number of evacuees in Johor remained at over the 5,000 mark.

State health and environment committee chairman R. Vidyananthan said a total of 5,486 individuals from 1,456 families were at 80 flood relief centres.

"The number of evacuees went up compared to the 5,399 recorded at 8am.

"Segamat is still the most affected district with 50 relief centres operating followed by Tangkak (13), Mersing (seven), Muar (five), Kota Tinggi (two), Batu Pahat (two) and Kluang (one)," he said.

Mixed reactions to Thaipusam plan

Penangites voice both concern and confidence over celebrations

By R. SEKARAN
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GEORGE TOWN: Although the state government is going ahead with plans to hold a Thaipusam festival on Jan 18, some devotees are calling for the celebration to be put off this year due to the Omicron variant wave.

Housewife Malligah Ramachandran said it was illogical to carry on with the festival minus the kavadi.

"Why continue with such a 'toned down' festival with so many standard operating procedures (SOP)? In my opinion, the best thing is to take a break and have a full-fledged celebration next year," said the 64-year-old.

A ban on the kavadi and thaneer panthal (refreshment stalls) for Thaipusam in Penang is among some of the changes being proposed this year.

Another change will be the golden chariot procession, which would only make a maximum of five stops with devotees carrying paal kudam (milk pots) from the vicinity of the temple.

Businessman R. Sathiaseelan, 64, also voiced his concerns about whether all the SOP would be adhered to.

"Even if the chariots make fewer stops, devotees would still converge at these stops with their offerings.

"Physical distancing will be hard to observe then.

"Controlling the crowd will be an arduous task and I hope the festival is held peacefully without any untoward incident."

However, lawyer K. Kunarathiraviam, 43, said he has full confidence that the festival would be conducted in a peaceful manner with devotees following the SOP.

"PHEB (the Penang Hindu Endowment Board) made the right decision to have the festival this year, minus the kavadi and refreshment stalls as milk pot carriers will be able to perform their vows.

"Most people are fully vaccinated and although there is a surge of the Omicron variant, the festival will be able to run smoothly as people are mature enough to know the risks if the SOP are not complied with."

PHEB chairman Dr P. Ramasamy said the SOP could be tweaked once they are announced by the Federal Government.

"We expect an announcement on the Thaipusam SOP tomorrow when the board holds its first meeting."

PLUS highway users still have option of using SmartTag, Touch 'n Go

PETALING JAYA: SmartTag and Touch 'n Go users do need to worry as the lanes will still be around despite the launch of the RFID lanes at the North-South Expressway (NSE), says PLUS.

Its strategic stakeholder engagement head, Syed Mohammed Idid, said a total of 164 RFID toll lanes will be opened from Juru, Penang, to Skudai, Johor, on Jan 15.

RFID stands for radio frequency identification, a system that provides another form of cashless payment for motorists, who will be able to top up their account using their Touch 'n Go e-wallet.

In a Facebook post yesterday, Syed Mohammed said the RFID rollout over the entire open and closed toll highways across the west coast network will provide convenience to 1.5 million existing RFID users.

He added that previously, the users could only use the system for intra-city travels on highways such as Duke and Sprint, among others.

"From Jan 15, they (road users) can now travel interstate for pasembur or laksa Johor from every other highway network using RFID.

"As for highway customers who are currently using SmartTag and TnGo, you are still most welcome to do so," he said.

He added that each toll plaza will have a minimum of one entry and exit RFID lanes, while more lanes may be added depending on demand. Last December, PLUS said that the timeline of replacing the SmartTag would depend on the rate of adoption by motorists.

Nevertheless, the government has set a target of introducing multi-lane free flow (MLFF) highways dependent on RFID by 2026.

MLFF highways are barrier-less highways where drivers make contactless payments by driving under gantries equipped with scanners, rather than through toll plazas with barriers.

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Maids not just for the rich

Even M40 families could use an extra hand, says Wanita MCA

PETALING JAYA: Domestic helpers should not be summarily categorised as a privilege of the wealthy as there are many M40 families where both husband and wife work long hours, says Wanita MCA.

Its national chairman Datuk Heng Seai Kie said there are many households where both husband and wife hold full-time jobs, while being the main caregivers for their ageing parents, whose movements or mental capacity have usually slowed or are impaired by one medical issue or another.

"Simultaneously, working parents also tend to their children, be they newborns or primary and secondary schoolgoing children," she said, adding that having the right domestic help goes a long way in alleviating the pressures of household chores and enabling work-life balance for working couples.

"This would be healthy for both working parents while encouraging family relationships to grow," she said in a statement yesterday in response to a report in *The Star* that recruitment fees for foreign domestic helpers may hit an astronomical RM25,000.

Heng said Wanita MCA is of the stand that recruitment fees for foreign domestic workers should be capped at RM20,000, inclusive of Covid-19 tests and quarantine fees.

> ***"Having the right domestic help goes a long way in alleviating the pressures of household chores."***
>
> Datuk Heng Seai Kie

She said the reported RM25,000 is too hefty a fee and would burden many families in the M40 group.

In urging the Human Resource Ministry to set a ceiling price on this recruitment fee, she said the government should also consider allowing maids from other countries besides Indonesia as a move to reduce over-reliance on one source country.

"The memorandum of understanding between Malaysia and Indonesia on maid recruitment had requested Putrajaya set a minimum wage of RM1,500 for its citizens working here.

"This amount is higher than Malaysia's RM1,200 minimum wage.

"In a competitive free market, the government could consider allowing more hired help from other countries.

"Wanita MCA is also concerned that when employers have to bear such hefty recruitment charges, they may in turn want to extract as much labour out of their workers as possible.

"Even worse, the employer may turn abusive, or exploit their domestic help by compelling her to toil in more than one home," she said, adding that employers must be reasonable too in dealing with their household help to enable a harmonious outcome for all.

Employers and agencies have cried foul over the recent increase in recruitment fees for domestic help, which is further compounded by the added costs for compulsory Covid-19 tests and quarantines.

No more hazards

Mohammad Faizol Ramli, 27, who works at the Nasi Sumatera Haji Ismail restaurant in Kota Baru, shows a plate of nails which would have previously been used to secure packets of cooked food. The packets are now wrapped using rubber bands following government statements to cease the use of nails and staples with which to secure food packets. — Bernama

Folk favouring smaller-scale celebrations

By GERARD GIMINO
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PETALING JAYA: For many families, "simplicity" seems to be the theme in their plans to welcome the Year of the Tiger.

"There is still a need to remain cautious, especially since the Omicron variant is present," said housewife Caryn Chan, 52.

Despite the already muted occasion last year, she said her family does not plan to celebrate with a bang this year.

She believed that it would be no less meaningful to spend time with her husband and two children.

Chan, who was infected with Covid-19 along with her son and daughter last year, said they had pulled through together as a family.

"This experience definitely strengthened our bond as a family, which makes this year's celebration all the more meaningful," said Chan.

She said the customary reunion dinner on the eve of Chinese New Year would be attended by close relatives with whom they meet regularly.

Married couple Wong Zhi Herng and Wong Kar Mun said they are also planning for a simple celebration at home.

"During pre-pandemic times, the reunion dinner would comprise up to 30 of our relatives.

"This year, however, we are limiting the number of guests to only those from our immediate family.

"As a precautionary measure, family members are also required to present a negative self-test kit result before coming," said the couple who are co-founders of a skincare product company.

Apart from the reunion dinner, Zhi Herng, 30, said there are no plans to travel domestically yet in view of the virus still being around.

Environmental consultant Cassandra Foo said her family is considering returning to their hometown to visit her grandparents.

"If my parents decide to return to Penang, it would be a simple family reunion with only about 12 people in total.

"There will be no open houses; only family members are being invited to our home," said Foo, 29.

Marketing executive Bryan Lee Soon Kheong, 28, said a wrench was thrown in his family's preparations for Chinese New Year as they were affected by the floods in Taman Sri Muda, Shah Alam.

"The lifts at our apartment are spoiled due to the floods, which makes it hard for my mother, who usually does the marketing, to continuously go up and down the stairs.

"Our fridge is also damaged, making it difficult to plan our purchases for the celebration," said Lee.

Lee said that prior to the movement control order first being implemented, preparations for the festivities were exciting. He had been looking forward to a positive start.

"This year, however, was a difficult start as everything from Christmas and New Year celebrations were hampered due to the floods.

"Despite staying in an apartment, I am still anxious about the weather and can only hope for the best in the lead-up to Chinese New Year," he added.

Hotels expect rise in domestic demand as CNY approaches

By GERARD GIMINO
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PETALING JAYA: As Chinese New Year approaches, hotels are expecting a gradual increase in occupancy rates.

Malaysian Association of Hotels chief executive officer Yap Lip Seng said the Chinese New Year season was usually a peak period for tourism and hotels with more international arrivals, with locals usually opting to go abroad.

"This time, the celebrations are expected to be driven domestically.

"While demand has returned, it is again very much focused on popular destinations such as Langkawi, Penang, Ipoh, Genting Highlands and the like.

"The 2021 Christmas and New Year holidays saw occupancy rates peaking at approximately 52% which is the average for Malaysia, with popular domestic holiday destinations performing better than others," he said.

Yap said that based on internal feedback, business for the coming Chinese New Year celebration is expected to be slightly lower than the year-end holidays, with local travellers being limited to certain groups and with fewer choices of domestic destinations.

"This could also be due to the current economic situation and concerns raised over the Omicron variant, besides the impact of the floods across the country.

"So we will likely see average occupancy of approximately 40% to 45% at most," added Yap.

He said that apart from the standard cleaning protocols, more hotels are now certified under MAH's Clean & Safe Malaysia hygiene and safety programme with Bureau Veritas Certifications Malaysia, which is part of Travel Safe Alliance Malaysia.

"Hotels have also limited the number of guests within manageable volumes and safe physical distancing standards.

"Guests are also actively provided with information and guides prior to arrival, to prepare them for standard operating procedure (SOP) compliance and a comfortable and uninterrupted stay," he said.

Malaysian Budget and Business Hotel Association national deputy president Sri Ganesh Michiel said bookings are yet to go up for budget hotels due to several factors.

"A majority of our customers are still wary of the current weather conditions, especially with the floods, and are undecided on travel.

"There is also the Covid-19 concern, with many still not having the confidence to travel interstate yet despite the current relaxations," he said.

Ganesh said the Christmas and New Year celebrations saw high occupancy rates for budget hotels in the big cities while those in smaller towns still fared poorly.

Avid traveller Mandeep Singh, 26, said he would not decline an opportunity to travel during the Chinese New Year holidays if his friends or family makes plans.

"The most important thing is that we look after ourselves and take our own precautionary measures.

"With the current relaxations, it is everyone's responsibility to ensure the safety of those around them," he said.

Online 'bromance' turns sour

Parcel scam suspects nabbed after businessman realises he was duped

By RSN MURALI
murali@thestar.com.my

MELAKA: A businessman's online relationship with another male turned sour when he ended up being yet another victim of a parcel scam.

"This is the first time my officers had probed an online fraud involving a romance between two men," said state police chief Deputy Comm Datuk Wira Abdul Majid Mohd Ali.

He said the 42-year-old businessman lodged a report on Nov 20.

This led to police arresting six foreigners aged between 35 and 40 in Puchong, Selangor, on Dec 30.

The Nigerian suspects have been on the police wanted list for their alleged involvement in a parcel scam syndicate.

DCP Abdul Majid said the businessman was lured with "amorous messages" by the male sender.

He was promised expensive gifts and cash amounting to US$79,000 (RM331,277).

The victim, he said, ended up transferring RM117,750 into six bank accounts in several transactions.

Eventually, he realised that he had been duped when the gifts did not arrive.

He said the modus operandi in parcel scams was often similar in which the victim is promised gifts but the scammer would later claim that the recipient must settle Customs fees and taxes.

"The conman will claim that the parcel sent via courier could not reach the victim as he must pay the taxes," he said.

DCP Abdul Majid in the latest case, an investigation team led by Melaka Commercial Crime chief Supt E. Sundra Rajan made a breakthrough when they arrested the syndicate members, three of whom are women.

They had been operating in the country for the past five years, he added.

"All the suspects had no travel documents and we are investigating how they entered the country in the first place," he said.

DCP Abdul Majid said the syndicate members also used the bank accounts of Malaysians to dupe their victims.

"We are probing the Malaysians involved who had given the fraudsters access to their bank accounts.

"The Malaysians were believed to have been paid a commission for the use of their bank accounts for cheating purposes," he said.

DCP Abdul Majid said 77 reports on parcel scams were reported in Melaka last year involving losses totalling RM2.4mil.

'Re-gazette Pasir Panjang beach and stop illegal sand mining'

MANJUNG: Turtle landing and eco-tourism activities as well as the physical structure of Pasir Panjang beach will be destroyed if the state government does not re-gazette the area, says Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM).

SAM field researcher Meor Razak Meor Abdul Rahman said the area was de-gazetted on Feb 2, 1989, and since then, various tree planting programmes had been implemented before being threatened by an illegal sand extraction project since last November.

He said several NGOs filed a complaint over the matter on Nov 4.

"The local community thought action was taken when they were informed that the authorities had inspected the area in early December, which is why they were shocked to see movement of sand mining machinery there since it was fenced up on Dec 28.

"We went to the area several days ago and found trees in the forest area had been chopped to make way for heavy vehicles to transport the extracted sand.

"Cut trees were piled up in addition to environmental destruction. This is very sad," he said.

Meor Razak claimed that to date, about 30% of the 130ha area had been encroached and it was feared that this would affect the turtle landing site, the coastal eco-system, as well as animals such as the sun bears and their natural habitat.

He said based on the National Physical Plan, all turtle landing sites in the peninsula, including the Pasir Panjang beach, were categorised as Rank 1 ESA (environmentally sensitive area), which can only be used for activities involving low-impact tourism, education and research.

Checks by Bernama found felled trees, piles of wood, as well as the presence of three sand dredgers in the area, which had been marked with barricade tape by the authorities.

According to previous reports, Manjung Municipal Council said it had not received any application for sand mining activity and had issued a stop-work order against the project.

Looming danger: The beautiful Pantai Pasir Panjang, which is part of the turtle landing site in Segari, is under threat of destruction.

Other news & views

Compiled by MARTIN CARVALHO, C. ARUNO and R. ARAVINTHAN

Nur Sajat intends to set up shop in Sydney

CONTROVERSIAL cosmetic entrepreneur Muhammad Sajjad Kamaruzzaman or better known as Nur Sajat (*pic*) intends to set up her business in Sydney, Australia, in the coming months, *Utusan Malaysia* reported.

"Alhamdulillah, wait for the opening of Nur Sajat Legacy Cosmetics in Sydney.

"A promise is a promise. The Nur Sajat team will spread its wings in Australia," Nur Sajat told her followers in a recent Instagram post.

The entrepreneur said that she intends to open her new business in the next four to five months.

Nur Sajat even joked with her followers, asking if any of them would like to work with her team.

"Thank goodness for my team in Australia. Those who want to work with me, are you ready to migrate abroad?" she said.

Many Internet users congratulated Nur Sajat on her achievements.

Nur Sajat, 36, was said to be on the run for the last few months after a blasphemy charge was levelled against him for dressing as a woman.

She was reportedly detained and fined by Thai authorities on Sept 8 for having an invalid passport.

Following her release, she is believed to have sought refuge through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The entrepreneur is currently residing in Sydney.

Authorities recently auctioned off some of her assets in Malaysia.

> Local model and actress Wanna Ali intends to build her own bungalow soon after successfully buying a Mercedes-Benz GLC 300 with her own money, *Harian Metro* reported.

The 25-year-old, whose real name is Nor Syazwana Mohd Ali, said it was about time for her to be more independent and not rely on her family.

The celebrity also wanted to silence those who assumed that it was easy for her to get what she wanted as her mother Datuk Ayu Puteh is a renowned producer.

Nor Syazwana said her childhood was not easy as her parents were divorced at an early age.

"My family was not well to do and my mother worked very hard to raise us.

"She is a 'superwoman' and till now, does not know the meaning of tiredness," she told the daily.

She credited her success to the values and principles instilled by her mother while growing up.

Nor Syazwana, who is currently living in her family home, said it would take about three years to construct her dream home.

Lokam already here, pokam on the way for CNY

SELLERS in the Klang Valley have already stocked up on lokam (mandarin oranges) for Chinese New Year but its cousin the pokam (honey mandarin oranges) will take two more weeks to arrive, reported *Sin Chew Daily*.

A check by the daily revealed that the various fruit warehouses were filled with boxes upon boxes of mandarin oranges.

A seller revealed that they have been stocking up since December but sales have yet to pick up.

They expect demand to rise by the middle of this month, which is two weeks before Chinese New Year on Feb 1.

> As the school term in Malaysia has been extended to February, first-year students at Chinese independent schools will have to attend their classes concurrently with the final two months of their Year Six school term, *Sin Chew Daily* also reported.

Once schools start on Jan 9 and 10, these students will have to attend their Year Six classes in the morning before going for online classes at Chinese independent schools in the afternoon, according to the educationist group United Chinese School Committees Association of Malaysia (Dong Zong).

The group's CEO Leong Seng Yee reassured parents that they will only focus on core subjects during online classes in January and February to prevent overwhelming the students.

The main aim of the online classes, he added, was to help the students get used to the environment at Chinese independent schools.

According to Leong, this will help the students to better transition from primary schools to being in a Chinese independent school, which is a secondary education institution, come March when they have to physically attend classes.

Dong Zong chairman Tan Tai Kim added that the online classes should be viewed as an orientation programme to help students get used to their new environment.

Each school will decide how many online classes they will hold in a week as well as how long each session lasts, Tan said.

Man turns violent after romantic rejection

A MAN in Tamil Nadu force-fed poison to a teenage girl and sliced his own wrist in an attempted murder-suicide after the girl rejected his advances, *Makkal Osai* reported.

D. Velmurugan, 20, who lived in Thoothukudi city, was apparently obsessed with the teenager who is from the same village as him.

A few days ago, he turned up at the girl's house, and told her he loved her. When the girl rejected his advances, the enraged man threatened to kill her.

He attacked her and forcefully poured what was believed to be insect poison into her mouth.

He then drank the same poison and slit his wrist.

Family members who discovered the unconscious pair rushed them to the hospital where they are undergoing treatment.

> The Human Resource Ministry has announced the setting up of a special team which would start work on a new website to compile all data on Hindu temples in the country, *Malaysia Nanban* reported.

The project will result in a comprehensive web portal which will have all the information on temples including their history, special features, festive dates, and other info.

Your opinion

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Letters must carry the sender's full name, address and telephone number.
A pseudonym may be included.

Advancing the cause for women in boardrooms

THE Securities Commission will make it mandatory for all public-listed companies to appoint at least one female director starting from Sept 1 this year. The move is a step forward in recognising the contribution of women in the corporate sector.

In 2011, the government had introduced the policy of having at least 30% of corporate boardroom membership to be women. However, according to the Securities Commission's CG Monitor 2021, the rate of women's representation in boardrooms was just 17% in public-listed firms overall and 25% in the Top 100 listed companies.

In Singapore, the Council of Board Diversity reported only 18% of women on the board of the country's Top 100 primary listed companies last year. These figures tell us that gender discrimination, social stereotyping and cultural factors still pervade in the workplace.

Mandating legal enforcement may help to boost women representation in the boardroom, but this poses some possible problems. For example, a quota-based approach based on a single element of diversity (i.e. gender) might oversimplify other complex systemic problems in the corporation.

Furthermore, the firm that rushes to meet the quota may not take other efforts at diversity, resulting in the "token" stigma. Tokens are sometimes perceived negatively or are often not trusted, thus disrupting the performance of the board.

Although women directors are valuable, critics have emphasised that gender boardroom quotas are unnecessary, arguing that what is more important is the quality of the directors who sit on the board.

Perhaps we have to look deeper into what challenges the firms are facing in reaching the 30% target of women in corporate boardrooms. A survey of corporate directors in Malaysia revealed that a limited pool of talent is one of the reasons behind the marginal progress of women making it to the boardroom. This is evident in male-dominated industries like manufacturing and technology where it is tough to find suitable women candidates.

The survey also revealed that not many women are willing to assume the role of board directors. This is because women, especially those above 50 years of age, are enjoying their lives and are more likely to forgo the opportunity of boardroom membership.

Perceptions related to family commitment and long maternity leave are also contributing factors. Also, not all companies have the right sources and allocation for new candidates.

Another question that is worth asking is whether the number of women directors in a boardroom is minimal due to corporate preference for men directors or merely women's indifference to taking up leadership roles.

Should the latter be the reason, corporate bodies and regulators may need to look into the factors underlying women's indifference towards accepting leadership roles within their own operations. The need to promote women's leadership is as important as creating an enabling environment for them to hone their leadership qualities.

Drawing on these scenarios, it would be better to let the market forces resolve the situation as some companies have more women than men not by design. But to obtain a wider pool of talents, the board should even consider using unconventional sources to identify the right candidates.

Companies could establish a formal mentoring programme where the senior leadership is accountable for grooming successors. The corporate sectors may sponsor potential women candidates for executive courses like board leadership programmes offered by well-known institutions.

Practical steps like providing a nursery close to or in the workplace, breastfeeding rooms, flexible working hours and working from home arrangements should be essential necessities of every company these days. This could motivate more women to aspire to face the challenges of the boardroom.

HANIS ADIELA IBRAHIM and DR ATIKAH SHAFAII
Universiti Utara Malaysia
Sintok, Kedah

Rakyat mostly at the mercy of public officials

I REFER to the letter "Dear Sir/Madam, please reply to my mail!" (*The Star*, Jan 4; online at https://bit.ly/3qS6Vh4).

I would say that the public are generally at the mercy of feckless officials in most government ministries and departments.

I, too, have written numerous letters to government officials highlighting shortcomings and issues that needed immediate attention, but I have never received any acknowledgement from them.

In May last year, for example, I sent video clips and photos of a slip road leading to a housing scheme, Taman Putera Indah and Taman Puteri Indah in Bidor, that needed some attention. Until now, no action has been taken by the local authorities.

I would like to relate an incident that happened in 1984 in Sungai Rengit, a small fishing village in Pengerang, Johor. Back then, I was a vector control inspector attached to the Vector Unit of the Health Department.

Three villagers were injured in a mishap and needed immediate medical attention. They needed to be sent to Kota Tinggi Hospital, about 80km from Sungai Rengit, which only had a health clinic manned by a medical assistant at that time.

There were two ambulances stationed at the Health Department in Sungai Rengit. On that particular day, one of the ambulances was not in roadworthy condition, so the medical team used the other vehicle to send two of the injured people to Kota Tinggi Hospital. They were accompanied by a staff nurse and assistant nurse.

A private firm that had an ambulance in Sungai Rengit offered to lend the vehicle to send the other patient to Kota Tinggi, but their driver was not available.

The medical assistant at the health clinic asked the Health Department's driver to drive the private ambulance, but the latter refused, citing government regulations.

As the villagers had started to hurl abusive and vulgar words against the Health Department, I volunteered to drive the private ambulance and take the patient to the Kota Tinggi Hospital. I also brought the medical team back safely to Sungai Rengit.

What I am saying is the Health Department's driver showed no humanity or decency, and unfortunately this attitude is still prevalent among most government officials these days.

NADARAJAN M. VAITHILINGAM
Bidor, Perak

Perils of not reviewing Google translations

THE maintenance of standards in anything and everything we do is essential for advancement in any field of human endeavour.

The moment we compromise on our standards – in academia, at work or in sports – we begin to lose our focus and descend into an abyss from which recovery is difficult.

This is especially true in the usage of language, in this case English, for communication. Of late, there have been a few cases where the decline in the proper use of English by some public service organisations has been evident.

The improper usage of English in these cases has been the subject of undeserved mockery in social media.

Some examples:

1. On the website purportedly of the Health Ministry, there was a post congratulating an officer who had been promoted to deputy secretary of Finance. The English version of the post referred to the officer, Datuk Harjeet Singh, as "Grandfather Harjeet Singh". The "Datuk" in Bahasa Melayu was wrongly translated as "grandfather".

2. Another post on the same website urged people to drink about six to eight glasses of water every day, but the Malay word "air kosong" was wrongly translated as "empty water".

3. In an invitation for an official function, the dress code was described as "long suit" instead of "lounge suit".

There are many other examples of such fractured English appearing on government websites and publications.

It is obvious where the problem lies. The officers who did the translation from Bahasa Melayu to English obviously depended on Google – specifically Google Translate – to do the word-for-word translation, and then just posted the machine-translated text without any thought or review.

Such postings must first be vetted by some responsible officer with a good command of English before they are uploaded. Otherwise, such mistakes are bound to recur, much to the embarrassment of the department or agency concerned. It does not take much to maintain standards, but it takes a lot of effort to make amends afterwards.

TAN SRI LEE LAM THYE
Kuala Lumpur

DO YOU KNOW ...
about the AFF Suzuki Cup?
The AFF Suzuki Cup, a biennial tournament organised by the Asean Football Federation, was inaugurated in 1996 in Singapore. It was known as the Tiger Cup until 2004 when Asia Pacific Breweries, the makers of Tiger Beer, withdrew as title sponsors. It was renamed AFF Suzuki Cup after Suzuki, the Japanese auto company, bought the naming rights in 2008.
Former midfielder K. Sanbagamaran scored the first goal for Malaysia at the inaugural match with Singapore that ended in a 1-1 draw. He scored six more goals in that tournament.
Legendary striker Zainal Abidin Hassan was Malaysia's most valuable player (MVP) in the 1996 tournament. Interestingly, he played centreback then. Thailand's current captain, Chanathip Songkrasin, has earned the most MVP awards. He got it twice - in 2014 and 2016.
Only two Malaysians have won the Golden Boot in the tournament. They are mercurial striker Safee Sali (five goals; 2010 edition) and inspirational midfielder Safiq Rahim (six goals; 2014 edition). Dangda won the Golden Boot three times - in 2008, 2012 and 2016.
Thailand's charismatic striker Teerasil Dangda is currently the tournament's leading scorer with 19 goals.
Thailand remains the best team in the championship with five trophies (1996, 2000, 2002, 2014 and 2016), followed by Singapore with four (1998, 2004, 2007 and 2012). Vietnam won the championship twice - in 2008 and 2018 - while Malaysia bagged the 2010 edition.
Safiq Rahim
Safee Sali
TheStar graphics

StarAsean+

Govt fears 'tens of thousands' of new Covid-19 cases

Thailand THE Thai government is considering measures such as limiting large gatherings and banning alcohol sales in restaurants to discourage customers to avert a wave of coronavirus infections, a health official says.

The country reported 3,899 cases yesterday, up from an average of 2,600 daily cases towards the end of last year, and the Omicron variant itself has tripled from last month's holiday period, government data showed.

If measures like wearing masks and regular testing are not followed, infections could reach the "tens of thousands in the next two weeks", Sumanee Watcharasin, a spokesman for the country's coronavirus taskforce, said.

She said the government will decide on new curbs tomorrow and also review the suspended "Test & Go" scheme that allows vaccinated arrivals to skip quarantine.

Since the pandemic began, Thailand has had a total of 2.2 million infections and nearly 22,000 coronavirus-related fatalities.

Residents are concerned about further disruptions to life.

"I'm so worried about the situation, but I'm being very cautious," said Kundarat Yutakom, a 60-year-old shopkeeper in Bangkok who opened her shop after a seven-month interval yesterday.

Others fear a repeat of last year when cases surged, straining hospitals and leaving many untreated.

"We really need to be prepared so we don't have a repeat of events of July and August when people were dying on the streets," said Chris Potranandana, head of the Zendai Foundation that helped people get medical help during last year's peak.

Thailand has vaccinated about 64.1% of an estimated 72 million people living in the country with two doses, but only 9.7% have received booster shots. — Reuters

Respite from strife
Myanmar refugees who fled a flare-up in fighting between the Myanmar army and insurgent groups and settled temporarily on the Moei River Bank riding on a boat after receiving aid from Thailand on the Thai-Myanmar border, in Mae Sot. — Reuters

Bid to keep the children safe

'11.4% of kids aged between five and 11 have received one vaccine dose'

Singapore MORE than one in 10 children aged between five and 11 have received at least one dose of the Covid-19 vaccine, says Singapore's director of medical services Kenneth Mak.

Associate Professor Mak said the vaccination exercise is progressing steadily. As of Monday, 11.4% of children have received the vaccine at the paediatric vaccination centres islandwide.

The vaccination exercise for children aged between five and 11 started on Dec 27. It is expected to involve more than 300,000 children in total.

Prof Mak, who was speaking during a press conference held by the Covid-19 multi-ministry task force yesterday, said the authorities remain confident that the paediatric formulation of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine is safe for children.

This has been supported by recent data released in the United States, he added.

Citing a study by the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, Prof Mak said it looked into data from the 8.7 million doses of the Covid-19 vaccine that have been administered to children in the US as at Dec 19, 2021.

There was a low serious adverse event rate. Side effects included local injection site pain, fever, headaches, fatigue, vomiting, rashes, seizures and allergic reactions, said Prof Mak.

He said there were only 11 cases of myocarditis – heart inflammation – despite 8.7 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine administered. This corresponds to a post-vaccination myocarditis rate of about 1.3 cases per 100,000 people, which is "far lower" than the rate seen in the older population.

> ***"With the coming Omicron wave, we expect to see more children being infected."***
> Prof Kenneth Mak

Prof Mak added: "So the dose reductions and the use of the paediatric formulations have preserved the efficacy of the vaccine and not compromised on the safety of vaccination."

He also said the risk of getting myocarditis or pericarditis – inflammation of the outer lining of the heart – due to a Covid-19 infection has been reported to be as high as 45 cases per 100,000 young people aged between 12 and 17.

"So clearly, the risk of myocarditis from vaccination is far lower than the risk of getting that same complication from infection," he said.

Prof Mak added that Singapore has been fortunate so far as not many children here have been infected with the coronavirus. But in the US and Britain, there has been a surge in the number of people being infected, in part due to the children there not being vaccinated against Covid-19 yet.

"With the coming Omicron wave, we expect to see more children being infected," he said, referring to the Covid-19 variant.

"Rather than deal with the pain of seeing your loved one, your loved child being infected, I urge all parents to accept the invitation to register your child for vaccination at any of our vaccination centres that cater for childhood Covid-19 vaccinations." — The Straits Times/ANN

No 'Black Nazarene' parade

Annual procession cancelled again due to Covid-19 concerns

Philippines AUTHORITIES have cancelled an annual procession, which normally draws millions of Catholic devotees accompanying a black wooden statue of Jesus Christ through the streets of Manila, for a second straight year due to coronavirus concerns.

The government's coronavirus task force cancelled the "Black Nazarene" procession, which is one of the country's largest religious festivals, before celebrations related to the Jan 9 procession were due to start tomorrow because of rising Covid-19 infections.

Unlike last year, there will be no in-person masses in the church housing the centuries-old statue, and police will be deployed to discourage people from gathering outside the building, authorities said.

"We understand (the cancellation) for our safety and health reasons," Father Douglas Badong, Parochial Vicar of Quiapo Church, told a news conference.

He said physical masses will take place in other provinces and online masses for devotees in the capital.

In prior years, devotees have thronged the statue as it is paraded through the streets of Manila.

Daily Covid-19 cases in the Philippines jumped to more than 5,400 on Tuesday from less than 200 on Dec 21, including some infections caused by the Omicron variant, forcing the government to tighten curbs this week.

"We have seen how quickly Covid-19 spread after the holiday season...we are calling for a suspension of all mass gatherings," Health Secretary Francisco Duque said late on Tuesday.

The Philippines has so far detected 14 domestic and imported cases of the highly contagious Omicron variant that has driven up Covid-19 case counts and dampened New Year festivities around much of the world.

With more than 2.86 million cases and 51,604 deaths, the Philippines has the second highest Covid-19 infections and casualties in South-East Asia, next to Indonesia. — Reuters

Former heads of state insurer jailed

Indonesia A COURT has sentenced two former heads of state insurer Asabri to 20 years in jail for graft after blaming them for causing 22.7 trillion rupiah (RM6.6bil) of losses to the state, the Antara news agency reported.

Judges also ordered Adam Rachmat Damiri and Sonny Widjaja, who were chief executives at Asabri between 2012 and 2020, to repay the state a total of 82.47 billion rupiah (RM24mil) and pay fines.

Prosecutors at the special corruption court in Jakarta had sought a 10-year jail term and fines, accusing the two of being involved in high risk investment decisions that turned sour.

Asabri is an insurance company that serves members of the military and police officers, as well as civil servants in the defence ministry. — Reuters

Indonesia

To higher ground
Locals using an inflatable mattress to evacuate their relatives following the floods in Lhoksukon, North Aceh. — Reuters

PM not infected with Covid-19, spokesman confirms

Thailand PRIME Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has not been infected with Covid-19, government spokesman Thanakorn Wangboonkongchana said, refuting social media rumours.

He also confirmed that Prayut is healthy and continues to serve the people.

"The premier has asked the public to follow information related to Covid-19 only from the Centre for Covid-19 Situation Administration, the Public Health Ministry and medical personnel," Thanakorn said.

"Meanwhile, the Public Health Ministry should present to the public the Covid-19 situation in countries where more than 100,000 infections have been reported daily to create awareness among Thais," he added.

Separately, Progressive Movement leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit posted on his Facebook page on Tuesday that he tested positive for Covid-19 on Monday after travelling abroad.

He said he is undergoing quarantine in line with Public Health Ministry regulations. He asked people to take care of their health.

The ministry reported yesterday morning that the past 24 hours had seen 3,899 new Covid-19 patients, 68 of whom were found in prisons.

The death toll has increased by 19, while 2,508 patients have been cured and allowed to leave hospital.

Cumulative cases in the country (since April 1, 2021) stand at 2,210,612 with 21,769 deaths. — The Nation/ANN

'Omicron could be the dominant strain soon'

Singapore THE highly contagious Omicron variant could completely replace the Delta variant in the next two months as the dominant Covid-19 strain in Singapore, infectious diseases expert Dale Fisher said.

Even as the country recorded 438 new Omicron cases on Tuesday, with the weekly infection growth rate going above one for the first time since Nov 12, he said that the number to focus on is that of serious cases rather than overall infection figures.

If too many people come down with severe illness, demand for hospital and intensive care unit beds will shoot up, and the healthcare system will risk being overwhelmed.

"If the predictions are correct, we can expect high numbers with a mild disease, but we can't be sure of this yet," said Prof Fisher, a senior consultant at the National University Hospital's infectious diseases division.

"Singapore needs to retain its balancing act of keeping the country safe while not stifling travel, social activities and economic activity unnecessarily. It is a constant challenge when there are unknowns appearing regularly."

The weekly infection growth rate refers to the ratio of community cases for the past week over the week before. A weekly infection growth rate that is more than one indicates that the number of new Covid-19 cases is increasing.

On Monday, Health Minister Ong Ye Kung said in an update on Singapore's Covid-19 situation that Omicron cases now account for 17% of all infections here, and warned that an Omicron wave is "imminent".

The country saw its first local case almost a month ago, when a staff member at Changi Airport tested positive for the variant.

On Dec 21, it reported its first cluster, which was linked to a gym in Bukit Timah.

This level of transmission is not surprising, given how quickly Omicron has replaced other variants around the world, observed Assoc Prof Hsu Li Yang, an infectious diseases expert at the National University of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health.

He added that Singapore is likely to report a sharp rise in cases over the next few weeks, although the relatively low Omicron-linked hospitalisation and death rates in countries with a similar demographic profile have been reassuring.

Early studies have suggested the new variant is more likely to cause reinfections than other strains. — The Straits Times/ANN

FROM ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK
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www.asianewsnet.net

Vietnam

Record high cases in Hanoi

THE city of Hanoi registered a record high of 2,499 new daily Covid-19 infections on Tuesday, as a total of 14,861 transmissions were confirmed nationwide. It was the third consecutive day the capital had over 2,000 cases, and it was again the leading locality for transmissions. — Vietnam News/ANN

Brunei

Brunei detects 10 new cases

BRUNEI Darussalam recorded 10 new Covid-19 cases yesterday, bringing the national tally of confirmed cases to 15,516. Of the new cases, five were local and the rest were imported cases. The new cases were detected through 2,632 laboratory tests carried out in the last 24 hours. — Borneo Bulletin/ANN

Thailand

Road accidents claim 333 lives

ROAD accidents claimed 333 lives over the New Year break's "seven dangerous days", according to the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation. Chiang Mai had the highest number of accidents at 96, while Bangkok saw the greatest death toll at 22. — The Nation/ANN

Laos

Probe into sale of train tickets

THE Prime Minister's Office has instructed the Laos-China Railway Company to look into the sale of train tickets after numerous complaints that some people were buying tickets from the operator and selling them at an inflated price. If this claim is true, the government will penalise offenders. — Vientiane Times/ANN

Outlook for Myanmar 'dire'

Crisis-wracked country on brink of civil war, warns Asean chair

Myanmar MYANMAR has "all the ingredients for civil war", Cambodia, chair of Asean, has warned ahead of a visit by Prime Minister Hun Sen to the crisis-wracked country.

Myanmar has been in chaos since a coup last year, with more than 1,400 people killed in a crackdown on dissent by security forces, according to a local monitoring group.

Hun Sen, whose country this year holds the rotating chairmanship of Asean, will visit Myanmar tomorrow and Saturday in an effort to defuse the crisis.

But Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn warned the outlook was dire.

"The political and security crisis in Myanmar is deepening, and has led to (an) economic, health and humanitarian crisis," he said.

"We feel that all the ingredients for civil war are now on the table.

"There are now two governments, there are several armed forces, people are undergoing what they call the civil disobedience movement and (there is) guerrilla warfare around the country."

He was speaking at a lecture on Monday organised by Singapore-based think-tank the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

The event was held under the Chatham House Rule, which means the speaker must give permission before his comments are reported to facilitate candour.

Cambodia's foreign ministry on Tuesday gave permission for his comments to be reported.

Prak Sokhonn rejected criticism that Hun Sen's visit would legitimise the junta, and said the kingdom's "immediate attention is on improving the situation in Myanmar".

Efforts would remain focused on a peace roadmap and the "five-point consensus" agreed on by Asean leaders last year, he said.

Since the coup, there has been little sign of progress.

A visit by an Asean special envoy to Myanmar was delayed after the junta refused to allow him to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi.

In response, the bloc excluded Myanmar's junta leader from a high-level October summit.

Myanmar's crisis has bad implications for "regional stability ... Asean's image, credibility, unity," Prak Sokhonn added.

Nevertheless, he said Cambodia was making efforts to allow Myanmar's junta chief to resume attending meetings of the bloc again. — AFP

Pipeline to saving Indonesia's sinking capital

Indonesia THE central government has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Jakarta administration to accelerate the construction of drinking water systems (SPAM) that would expand tap water service in the city.

The expansion of tap water services is seen as crucial to halting land subsidence in the sinking capital, which is primarily driven by excessive groundwater extraction as not all residents have access to piped water.

Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan welcomed the agreement on Monday, saying he hoped it would help the city to address the long-standing issue of land subsidence caused by excessive groundwater extraction.

"We are racing against time. On the one side, we experience land subsidence because of groundwater extraction. On the other side, there is a lack of tap water service for residents," said Anies.

"We want to address these two issues at the same time."

He went on to add that he hoped the MOU would help the city administration accelerate the expansion of its tap water service coverage, which was targeted to reach all Jakartans by 2030.

Looming crisis: A young girl playing during a tidal flood at Muara Angke Port in Jakarta, Indonesia. Rising sea levels and rapid land subsidence due to over-extraction of groundwater have caused the capital city to sink. — AP

Under the agreement, the Public Works and Housing Ministry will build three SPAM facilities, which will be located outside Jakarta, to provide additional water supplies to the capital city.

"Hopefully, we can provide all Jakartans with our tap water service so that we can control groundwater usage," said Public Works and Public Housing Minister Basuki Hadimuljono.

A recent model by the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) geodesy research division suggests that about 9,000ha, or roughly 14% of Jakarta's land area, is currently below sea level, although seawalls and river embankments have largely prevented seawater from entering these areas.

If left unchecked, up to 28% of the city could sink below sea level by 2050 because of land subsidence and rising sea levels, with some areas sinking as much as four metres. — The Jakarta Post/ANN

Duterte won't apologise for drug war deaths

Philippines PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte said he will never apologise for the deaths of suspected drug users and dealers killed in police operations under his war on drugs that has alarmed rights groups.

More than 6,200 drug suspects have died in anti-narcotics sting operations since Duterte took office in June 2016 until November 2021, government data shows.

"I will never, never apologise for the deaths," Duterte said in a weekly national address. "Kill me, jail me, I will never apologise."

> ***"Kill me, jail me, I will never apologise."***
> Rodrigo Duterte

Rights groups and critics say law enforcers have summarily executed drug suspects, but police say those killed were armed and had violently resisted arrest.

Duterte, in his first national address this year, vowed to protect law enforcers doing their duty, telling them to fight back when their life is in danger.

Duterte, 76, won the presidency by a wide margin in 2016.

The firebrand leader is constitutionally barred from seeking re-election next year. Judges at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in September approved a formal investigation into Duterte's war on drugs.

The ICC suspended the probe in November following a request by the Philippines, which cited its own investigations.

Duterte unilaterally cancelled the Philippines' ICC membership in March 2018, a month after its prosecutor said a preliminary examination over the drugs war was under way. — Reuters

'The Beach' movie landmark beckons again

Thailand THAILAND has reopened Maya Bay, a white sandy beach made famous by the 2000 film *The Beach* starring Leonardo DiCaprio, more than three years after closing it to allow its ecosystem to recover from the impact of thousands of visitors each day.

The beach, surrounded by 100m high cliffs, lies on the island of Phi Phi Leh in the Andaman Sea, and is only accessible by boats from nearby spots such as the islands of Phuket or Phi Phi, or mainland Krabi.

Authorities shut the whole of Maya Bay to the public in 2018, saying coral reefs and beach areas had been damaged by constant tourist activities.

But since the start of this year some visitors have been allowed to return.

"The sharks have come back, coral reefs are regrowing, and the water is clear again," said Yuthasak Supasorn, the governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand.

"These things show that nature will heal if we give it time, and we have to work to keep it that way too."

To ensure it remains protected, authorities said only up to 375 visitors will be allowed to visit at one time and swimming will be prohibited for now.

Boats will only be allowed to dock at a designated location at the back of the bay to avoid damaging coral reefs, they said.

"Maya Bay is beautiful, it's a marvellous place," said Manuele Panin, a 40-year-old tourist from Italy, who was visiting the beach.

"I think it is fine that it has been closed all this time to protect the nature and allow it to restore and recover." — Reuters

Pristine shores: A tourist visiting Maya Bay as Thailand reopens its world-famous beach after closing it for more than three years to allow its ecosystem to recover from the impact of over-tourism. — Reuters

HK bans after 6pm dine-in

City imposes restriction due to Omicron cluster

HONG KONG: The city is imposing new virus control measures for the first time in almost a year as the highly transmissible Omicron variant seeps into the community and threatens to spur a winter wave.

The city will ban indoor dining after 6pm and close some venues, according to reports from media outlets, including the *South China Morning Post* and *Oriental Daily*.

The new rules return to physical distancing restrictions that were in place a year ago and eased after Chinese New Year in 2021.

The tightening comes as the Asian financial hub this week preliminarily reported the first local coronavirus case that officials were unable to trace to its source.

The government has been trying to contain an Omicron cluster linked to a local restaurant, which triggered the first local transmissions in nearly seven months.

Hong Kong is one of the only places in the world that has not experienced a Delta outbreak. The growing number of Omicron cases and a looming expansion of the vaccine mandate has enlivened the city's stagnant immunisation rollout.

While 66% of the city's population have received a first injection, just 22% of the over-80 group have started receiving jabs. — Bloomberg

Henan province sees new virus cases

BEIJING: Henan province reported four new locally transmitted confirmed cases of Covid-19 on Tuesday, along with 18 asymptomatic carriers, the provincial Health Commission reported yesterday.

Of the confirmed cases, one was found in Zhengzhou, one in Zhoukou and two in Xuchang. Of the asymptomatic carriers, nine were in Zhengzhou, one was in Zhoukou and eight were in Xuchang.

The coronavirus risk levels of two areas in Yuzhou, a county-level city under the administration of Xuchang, were classified as high, the Yuzhou epidemic prevention and control headquarters said on Tuesday night.

The city completed the first round of testing covering 951,078 residents by noon on Tuesday, and a second round was launched.

Three transmission chains of the virus have been initially identified in Zhengzhou, one among mahjong players, one at a funeral gathering, and one among family members, officials said at a news conference.

Nearly 500 close contacts in Zhengzhou have been traced since the first two cased were identified on Monday. — China Daily/ANN

Ready for the Games
President Xi Jinping touring the National Speed Skating Oval, a competition venue for the 2022 Winter Olympics, in Beijing. The Winter Olympics is scheduled to begin on Feb 4, amid smog woes. — Xinhua

Expert: Support Covid-19 fight in Xian

BEIJING: The Covid-19 outbreak in Xian is the most serious in China since the lockdown of Wuhan, Hubei province, at the beginning of 2020, and the people of the whole country should give their strong support to the city in its efforts to fight it, a senior epidemiologist said.

Zeng Guang, former chief scientist of epidemiology at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said the Covid-19 outbreak in Xian is caused by the Delta variant which spreads faster than the original coronavirus strain in Wuhan.

"The task is arduous, as the transmission chain has multiple links and moves in secret," said Zeng, a member of the National Health Commission's senior-level expert panel.

"In the face of such a serious threat, the whole country should fully support Xian in fighting against the pandemic," he told members of the media.

Zeng said he hoped Xian would find new ways of containing the spread of the coronavirus at the beginning of the outbreak.

"The Covid-19 spread in Xian today could also happen in other cities," he said. — China Daily/ANN

Staying fit: Residents using exercise equipment at a public park in Beijing. China is reporting a major drop in Covid-19 infections in Xian, which has been under a tight lockdown for the past two weeks. — AP

Social media star sued over livestream slurs

Cambodia TWELVE representatives of the Bunong indigenous community in Mondulkiri province have filed a lawsuit with the provincial court against social media celebrity Try Dana, alleging that she had publicly insulted them on Facebook on Dec 22.

In the letter of complaint, the Bunong representatives stated that Dana made statements that publicly insulted the Bunong people and affected their honour and dignity.

The letter said that in order to change the negative attitudes of some Cambodians towards the Bunong indigenous people and to restore their honour and dignity, Dana must publicly apologise to them.

They also requested that the court fine Dana for the sum of 10 million riel (RM10,300) and order her to pay US$200,000 (RM838,700) in compensation to the Bunong community.

Try Dana is a singer and social media influencer who is best known for selling jewellery and lotions via Facebook and other platforms.

In a live video posted to her Facebook account on Dec 22 and reviewed by *The Post* while researching this story, Dana said she was angry with her former husband and she insults him in the video – calling him things like "crazy" and "cheap" – while discussing her personal relationship with him.

At one point in the video, Dana states: "If (my ex-husband) chats to me and says that (he) realised his mistake and his mistakes were due to the influence of his friends and family, maybe I'd be relieved, because he comes from these rude, gangster-type Bunong people living on the outskirts of the village."

Kreung Tola, adviser to the Bunong indigenous communities in Mondulkiri province, said Dana's insults were racist and encouraged the public to view Bunong people as ignorant criminals who are lower than animals.

He said the Bunong do not need such discrimination and misunderstanding in their lives and that – although they are from a different ethnic group than Khmer – they are also citizens of Cambodia.

Tola said people living in the same kingdom should be united to build their nation together and there was no justification for this kind of discrimination.

"Bunong people have brains, strength and patriotism. During the war, the Bunong served as soldiers and medics and all kinds of other roles," he said.

He added that today there were still Bunong serving in the military, military police and national police as well as others who worked in the National Assembly and Senate.

"Why does she look down on us? Why does she think her ex-husband represents all Bunong people? We should not regard this or that group of people as being all bad or all good. We are individuals but we're also all the same people. We are Cambodians who are living together with unity, understanding and tolerance," he said.

According to Tola, there have been many cases of racism and discrimination against the Bunong people in the past and that is why the Bunong people are sensitive to such insults and want to eliminate those stereotypes so that these incidents do not keep happening in the future.

The representatives of the Bunong also noted how racism has been used in the past as a pretext for wars, massacres and genocides between ethnic groups all over the world and as a minority ethnic group they felt that in the interests of their community's long-term safety these outward displays of racism must be challenged.

"We do not want to see (conflict) again. We want to live together, united. We want to develop, grow and build this nation together with you. We do not want a war within this nation between one ethnicity and another," he said. — The Phnom Penh Post/ANN

StarWorld

Britain faces hospital crisis

Medical centres back on 'war footing' as infections surge

LONDON: British hospitals have switched to a "war footing" due to staff shortages caused by a wave of Omicron infections, the government said, as the country's daily Covid-19 caseload breached 200,000 for the first time.

The 24-hour tally, after chalking up multiple records in the run-up to New Year, hit 218,724 and another 48 deaths were reported in the latest government data on Tuesday.

Hospital admissions have not hit anything like the peaks of previous waves of the pandemic, and the number of people requiring ventilation has remained flat so far.

But the state-run National Health Service (NHS) is struggling with staff forced to stay at home after testing positive, and Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised action to plug staffing gaps in the worst-hit areas.

The reactivation of emergency "Nightingale" clinics, along with the drafting of medical volunteers backed by army support, meant the NHS was back on a "war footing", he told a news conference.

"So anyone who thinks our battle with Covid-19 is over, I'm afraid, is profoundly wrong. This is a moment for the utmost caution," he said.

But he ruled out another nationwide lockdown, crediting mass vaccinations, including a recent programme of booster shots, as the NHS marked a year since administering the first Oxford/AstraZeneca jab.

Transport networks also battled absences, leaving commuters facing long waits on their return to work after a public holiday on Monday, while municipal services such as household bin collections were hampered.

But Johnson said a new programme of daily testing for 100,000 "critical workers", including in transport and food processing, would help Britain "ride out this Omicron wave".

Vaccines minister Maggie Throup said it was unclear how many Britons were self-isolating after a Christmas surge in Omicron cases.

"But what is good news is that it doesn't seem to be resulting in severe diseases as some of the other variants did," she told Sky News.

Around 50,000 NHS staff were reportedly absent from work last week because they were ill or self-isolating. — AFP

Down we go
People using the snow-covered West Front lawn of the US Capitol to sled in Washington, DC, following a heavy snowstorm. — AFP

WHO official downplays coronavirus variant found in France

PARIS: The World Health Organisation (WHO) said a coronavirus variant found in France hasn't become much of a threat since it was first identified in November.

The variant "has been on our radar," Abdi Mahamud, a WHO incident manager on Covid, said at a press briefing in Geneva on Tuesday.

"That virus had a lot of chances to pick up."

The variant was identified in 12 people in the southern Alps around the same time that Omicron was discovered in South Africa last year.

The latter mutation has since travelled the globe and kindled record levels of contagion, unlike the French one that researchers at the IHU Mediterranee Infection – helmed by scientist Didier Raoult – nicknamed IHU.

The first patient identified with the variant was vaccinated and had just returned from Cameroon, IHU researchers wrote in a paper published on the medRxiv server in late December, where they first drew attention to the atypical mutations.

It's "too early to speculate on virological, epidemiological or clinical features of this IHU variant based on these 12 cases," they wrote in the article, which hasn't been peer reviewed.

Raoult stirred controversy in the early stages of the pandemic by recommending treatment with hydroxychloroquine.

The WHO monitors multiple variants and when it finds one may pose a significant risk, it declares it a "variant of concern". This one is only under investigation.

Meanwhile, France President Emmanuel Macron faced anger from opponents and chaos in parliament yesterday after issuing a provocative warning to people in France who are not yet vaccinated against Covid-19 that he would pressure them as much as possible by limiting access to key aspects of life.

Macron's comments came as the government seeks to push through parliament legislation that will make vaccination compulsory to enjoy cultural activities, use intercity train travel or visit a cafe from Jan 15. — Agencies

Israel study shows fivefold antibody rise with fourth jab

RAMAT GAN: Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said an Israeli study indicated that fourth coronavirus vaccinations were "safe" and increased antibodies "fivefold", as the country expands its inoculation campaign amid rising infections.

Speaking during a Tuesday visit to Sheba Hospital near Tel Aviv, which administered fourth vaccines to 154 of its staff a week earlier as part of a study, he said the extra shot "works".

"A week into the fourth dose, we know with a high level of certainty that the fourth dose is safe," he said alongside Professor Galia Rahav, head of Sheba's infectious disease unit and leader of the study.

"A week after the administration of the fourth dose, we see a fivefold increase in the number of antibodies in the vaccinated person.

"This most likely means a significant increase in the protection against infection and against severe hospitalisation and symptoms," Bennett said, noting that the facility was due to publish its findings soon.

Sheba Hospital spokesman Steve Walz said the study used Pfizer jabs and a separate trial of fourth vaccine shots for 150 people using the Moderna vaccine would start this week.

Israel on Friday began administering fourth jabs to people with weakened immunity. On Monday, it expanded that to health workers and people over 60.

The moves come a year after it began a huge vaccination drive on the back of a data-sharing accord with US pharmaceutical firm Pfizer. — AFP

US sets global record with nearly one million cases in a day

NEW YORK: The United States has reported nearly one million new coronavirus infections, the highest daily tally of any country in the world and nearly double the previous US peak set a week ago as the spread of the Omicron variant showed no signs of slowing.

The number of hospitalised Covid-19 patients has risen nearly 50% in the past week and now exceeds 100,000, according to data collected by Reuters, marking the first time that threshold has been reached in a year.

The latest surge, which forced waves of cancellations from commercial airlines flights to Broadway shows in recent weeks, was disrupting plans for public schools to welcome students back from winter vacation.

Chicago Public Schools, the nation's third-largest school district, cancelled classes yesterday after the teachers' union voted in favour of a return to remote learning.

In Los Angeles County, the presiding judge of one of the country's largest court systems ordered a two-week delay of criminal trials due to the latest wave of infections.

Nationally, the United States has seen a daily average of 486,000 new cases over the past week, a rate that has doubled in seven days and far outstrips that of any other country.

The 978,856 new infections documented on Monday included cases tallied on Saturday and Sunday, when many states do not report.

The average number of US Covid-19 deaths has remained fairly steady throughout December and into early January at about 1,300 a day, according to a Reuters tally, though deaths typically lag behind case numbers and hospitalisations.

Omicron appears to be far more easily transmitted than previous iterations of the virus.

The new variant was estimated to account for 95.4% of cases identified in the United States as of Jan 1, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said on Tuesday.

The World Health Organisation said evidence suggested that Omicron is causing less severe illness.

Nevertheless, public health officials have warned that the sheer volume of Omicron cases threatens to overwhelm hospitals, some of which are already struggling to handle Covid-19 patients, primarily among the unvaccinated.

Maryland Governor Larry Hogan declared a 30-day state of emergency on Tuesday and mobilised 1,000 National Guard members to pandemic response operations as Covid-19 hospitalisations in the state hit a record high of more than 3,000, up more than five-fold in seven weeks. — Reuters

First Omicron death in India

New Delhi to lock down over weekend amid fresh surge in cases

NEW DELHI: India reported its first Covid-19 death linked to the fast-spreading Omicron variant in the western state of Rajasthan, a federal health ministry official said.

Omicron cases in the country have now risen to 2,135, the official told a small group of reporters in New Delhi.

The capital will lock down over the weekend as authorities grapple with a fresh surge in coronavirus cases, partly fuelled by the Omicron variant.

The country was battered by a devastating Covid-19 outbreak last year that overwhelmed hospitals and crematoriums, but daily case numbers had since then stayed reasonably low until last week.

Delhi's new restrictions came the same day the sprawling megacity's chief minister, Arvind Kejriwal, announced he had been infected and was suffering "mild symptoms".

Kejriwal said he was isolating at home and urged those in contact with him in the past few days to get tested.

The capital last week closed gyms and cinemas, as well as imposed an overnight curfew in an effort to stem the spread.

All residents besides essential workers will now be asked to stay home from tomorrow night to Monday morning.

"The government is fully prepared to fight any Covid situation," the city's deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said in a Tuesday address.

More than 200,000 people died across India last spring after a wave of Delta variant infections that brought the healthcare system to its knees.

India's 481,000 known Covid-19 deaths is the world's third-highest toll, behind the United States and Brazil.

But under-reporting is widespread and some studies have estimated its actual toll could be up to 10 times higher.

India began rolling out vaccinations for teenagers on Monday and will offer booster doses for people over 60 from next week. — Agencies

Tempers fraying in Australia as cases hit new highs

SYDNEY: Australia's daily Covid-19 cases hit a record high for the third consecutive day, further straining hospital resources and testing facilities as public anger grows over the handling of the fast-moving Omicron outbreak.

Many Australians, already unhappy about long queues at public testing centres and a shortage of at-home tests, were further incensed when news broke that tennis world number one Novak Djokovic had been given a medical exemption to enter the country.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison, under pressure at the start of an election year, has sought to reassure voters that his centre-right Liberal-National Party coalition has the situation under control, while keeping tight control on the purse strings.

"There are no silver bullets here," Morrison told reporters ahead of a meeting of national Cabinet, the group of federal and state and territory leaders tasked with handling the pandemic.

"You've just got to work the problem, work it together and push through."

Officials reported a record 64,774 new cases, the majority in New South Wales and Victoria, the country's most populous states.

That easily exceeded the previous day's national tally of around 47,800.

Total infections have surged more than 50 times from around 1,200 since late November, when the first Omicron case was detected in the country.

People admitted to hospitals in NSW and Victoria rose 10% over the previous day, and authorities warned those numbers would rise further over the next several weeks.

"We have got some challenging weeks ahead of us," NSW Deputy Health Secretary Susan Pearce told reporters.

The rapid surge in cases in recent weeks has led to long lines at publicly-funded PCR testing centres. That prompted authorities to ask people to only seek PCR tests if symptomatic, which in turn led to a shortage of rapid antigen tests, which can be used at home but must be purchased privately.

Morrison, who must call a federal election before May, has ruled out subsidising the majority of the at-home testing kits, citing a heightened role for "personal responsibility". — Reuters

Canada to pay indigenous families

OTTAWA: Canada announced a US$31.5bil (RM132bil) agreement to reform its discriminatory child welfare system and compensate indigenous families who suffered because of it, in what an official called the country's largest settlement.

The agreements-in-principle include C$20bil (RM66bil) for First Nations children who were removed from their families and caregivers and put into state care, typically schools meant to forcibly assimilate them.

"No compensation amount can make up for the trauma people have experienced. But these agreements-in-principle acknowledge to survivors and their families the harm and pain caused by the discrimination in funding and services," said Patty Hajdu, the Minister of Indigenous Services.

The deal, which stemmed from lawsuits brought by First Nations families against the Canadian government, acknowledges that "discriminatory underfunding" of child and family services in indigenous communities had inflicted suffering on those involved.

Despite making up less than eight percent of children under 14, indigenous children account for more than half of those in Canada's foster care, according to a 2016 census.

Over the past three decades, at least 150,000 indigenous children were ripped from their homes and placed into residential schools.

Thousands died, mostly from malnutrition, disease or neglect, in what a truth and reconciliation committee called "cultural genocide" in a 2015 report. — AFP

Beauty behind the mist

Tourists visiting the Taj Mahal amidst fog in Agra. — AFP

California twins born in different years

LOS ANGELES: A set of twins born 15 minutes apart in California have very different birthdays – one in 2021 and the other in 2022.

Alfredo Antonio Trujillo came into the world at 11.45pm on New Year's Eve in the city of Salinas.

A quarter of an hour later, on New Year's Day, his sister Aylin Yolanda Trujillo was born.

The Natividad Medical Center, where the babies were delivered, said in a statement last week that some estimates suggest there is a one-in-two-million chance of twins being born in different years.

"It's crazy to me that they are twins and have different birthdays," the babies' mother, Fatima Madrigal, was quoted as saying.

Dr Ana Abril Arias described the births as "one of the most memorable deliveries of my career".

"It was an absolute pleasure to help these little ones arrive here safely in 2021 and 2022."

Big brother Alfredo tipped the scales at six pounds and one ounce (2.75kg) while the baby of the family, Aylin, was a healthy five pounds and 14 ounces.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says around 120,000 twins are born every year in the United States, representing roughly 3% of births. — AFP

Double joy: The Trujillo twins. — Reuters

N. Korea fired suspected ballistic missile, says South

SEOUL: North Korea fired a suspected ballistic missile off its east coast, just hours before South Korean President Moon Jae-in attended a groundbreaking ceremony for a rail line he hopes will eventually connect the divided Korean peninsula.

North Korea's first launch since October underscored leader Kim Jong-un's New Year vow to bolster the military to counter an unstable international situation amid stalled talks with South Korea and the United States.

The presumed missile was fired around 8.10am from an inland location, over the east coast and into the sea, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said.

Hours later, Moon visited the South Korean east coast city of Goseong, near the border with the North, where he broke ground for a new rail line that he called "a stepping stone for peace and regional balance" on the peninsula.

In remarks at the ceremony, Moon acknowledged the launch raised concerns of tensions, and called for North Korea to make sincere efforts for dialogue.

"We should not give up the hope for dialogue in order to fundamentally overcome this situation," he said. "If both Koreas work together and build trust, peace would be achieved one day."

The apparent missile launch by the nuclear-armed North highlighted the challenges Moon faces in his push to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough before his five-year term ends in May.

Reconnecting the two Koreas by rail was a central issue in meetings between Kim and Moon in 2018, but those efforts went nowhere as talks aimed at convincing North Korea to surrender its nuclear weapons in exchange for easing international sanctions faltered in 2019.

Kim's New Year speech made no mention of efforts by South Korea to restart negotiations or offers by the United States to talk, though analysts noted that doesn't mean he has closed the door on diplomacy.

South Korea's National Security Council convened an emergency meeting, expressing concern the launch "came at a time when internal and external stability is extremely important" and calling on North Korea to return to talks.

Japan's defence minister said the suspected ballistic missile had flown an estimated 500km.

"Since last year, North Korea has repeatedly launched missiles, which is very regrettable," Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters.

The missile was fired from Jagang province on the northern border with China, South Korea's JCS said, the same province where North Korea tested its first hypersonic missile in September.

UN Security Council resolutions ban all ballistic missile and nuclear tests by North Korea, and have imposed sanctions over the programmes. — Reuters

Condolences

Our Deepest Sympathies and Heartfelt Condolences to

DATO' CHUA MENG MIN AND FAMILY

(On the passing of his beloved wife)

DATIN YAP CHOI HAR

Passed away peacefully on Tuesday, **04 January 2022**

From:

PISTEUO ADVISORY SDN BHD (1168710K)

MMTS CONSULTING SDN BHD (666971-M)

WAVE POWER GROUP SDN BHD (1200289T)

JP GOLDSTONE ADVISORY (1361361-U)

REVINE CLINIC (1355671-W)

PROVIDENT WEALTH SDN BHD (1264920W)

BRACHA SERVICES SDN. BHD. 201001010762 (895422-D)

Heartfelt Thanks

We, the family of the late

DATO' SRI IR. OOI BOON SENG, SSAP

(Departed on 1st Jan 2022)

would like to express our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the doctors and nurses who have cared for him, pastors and members of Wesley Methodist Church, colleagues at Lone Pine Group of Companies, relatives, friends and business associates for your prayers, love and support, messages of condolences, floral tributes, kind attendance, contributions, and assistance rendered during our recent bereavement.

Your thoughts and prayers have been a great comfort to us all.

Wife: Datin Sri Mabel Tay Siew Hwei

Son:
Ooi Sheng Long

Daughters:
Ooi Pei Ling
Ooi Pei Qi
Ooi Peiying

Sons-in-law:
Kao Pao-Tang
Galvin Widjaja

Grandsons:
Gabriel Kao Peng Jie
Gideon Kao Bing Rui
Gregory Kao Peng Xun

Granddaughters:
Gracelyn Kao Yun Ru
Jasmin Suyin Widjaja
Josephine Suwen Widjaja

He will be dearly missed and loved forever by us.

His legacy continues to live through us and the many people he has inspired.

OBITUARY

My Beloved Wife
and
Our Beloved Mum

DATIN YAP CHOI HAR

Passed away peacefully on Tuesday, 04 January 2022

Dearly missed and forever cherished by her beloved :
Husband : Dato' Chua Meng Min
Daughter : Chua Xin Yun **Son** : Chua Zong You

Funeral service will be held at **Nirvana 2, Level 3, Majestic Hall, No.16, Jalan Dewan Bahasa, Bukit Seputeh, 50460 Kuala Lumpur**

Visitation Hours:
06.01.2022 (Thursday) 10:00am - 10:00pm

Funeral Service:
07.01.2022 (Friday) 1:00pm

Cortege will leave for cremation at Nirvana Crematorium (Shah Alam)

Obituary

Madam Pook Yit Siang

Age 83 years old, passed away peacefully on
Tuesday, 4th January 2022

She will be dearly missed, lovingly remembered and forever cherished by all her loved ones

Late Husband : Law Toi

Sons:
Law Chen Soo
Law Chen Ann

Daughters-in-law:
Jessie Ling Geok Keng
Esther Wong Pei Sze

Daughters:
Felicia Law Lee Chin
Angie Law Lee Cheng

Sons-in-law
David McNeill
Joe Lee Wei Koh

Grandchildren:
Lynette Law
Caitlin Law
Brandon Law
Anders Law

William McNeill
Ethan Lee
Lucas Lee

Brothers:
Pook Teck Fook

Sisters
Pook Niong Loi
Juraidah Abdullah

Goddaughter:
Shirley Pom Siaw Li

Arrangement entrusted to
Nirvana Memorial Center (Sungai Besi), Orchid Hall (Parlour 15)

Wake Services
06th January 2022 at 3.00pm - 10.00pm
07th January 2022 at 10.00am - 10.00pm

Funeral Service
08th January 2022 at 10am After which the cortege shall leave for burial at Nirvana Memorial Garden (Semenyih).

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith".2 Timothy 4:7

Doris Joshua Danam

Ex-Telecom Penang / Butterworth
17.02.1934 – 03.01.2022

Was called home to be with the Lord. Her laughter, love and generosity will be sadly missed by relatives and friends, near and far.

Husband: The late Joshua Danam

Children:	**Spouses:**
Reuben Danam	Caroline Danam
Raymond Danam	Pamela Kanagaratnam
Roland Danam	Sheila Danam

Grandchildren:
Jerome, Royce, Jocelyn, Renae, Reianna and Isaac Danam

Funeral Service will be as follows:
7th January 2022 (Friday) at **11am**
Address: **St Marks Church Butterworth Jalan St Marks, 12000 Butterworth**
For further information please contact
Raymond Danam 016 860 9061

9th Anniversary
In Loving Memory Of Our Beloved

Dr. Yeoh Oon Tatt
Departed 6 Jan 2013

Each passing year etches your memory deeper into the sands of time.

Greatly missed and fondly held in memory by

Wife Catherine, son and daughter-in-law Alvin and Frisye and granddaughter little Allison, daughter and son-in-law Cindy and Wrestley and grandson Hayden, family and friends.

In Loving Memory
Samuel Oivo

Five years have rolled by, but you remain deeply loved with cherished memories in our hearts and minds always. Greatly missed by your loving wife, children and their families.

Forever in our hearts.

Always beloved and dearly missed.

Schauffele looks to hit the ground running at Kapalua

HAWAII: Olympic champion Xander Schauffele would not have been competing at this week's Sentry Tournament of Champions in Hawaii if not for a change in the eligibility rules and the American hopes to make the most of his opportunity.

The tournament is typically reserved for those who won on the PGA Tour during the previous year but the circuit's policy board approved a new eligibility category to include the men's Olympic gold medallist in the year following his win.

"It's always nice to be, to come back. It means that you won a tournament," Schauffele, whose last PGA Tour win came at the 2019 Sentry Tournament of Champions, said on Tuesday during a news conference from the Plantation Course at Kapalua.

"I feel extra fortunate this year. The Olympics wasn't on the list and the Tour was nice enough to sort of put it on the list with the help of some players lobbying for me."

Schauffele, however, is not here for a relaxing tropical getaway but rather hopes to make some noise in the PGA Tour's first event of 2022 after a rather slow start to his season.

The world number six has competed in two official PGA Tour events this season, both last October where he finished in a share of 18th at the CJ Cup @ Summit in Las Vegas and a share of 28th at the ZOZO Championship in Japan the following week.

"For the most part I didn't really get off to that sort of hot start that makes me really comfortable pushing through," said Schauffele. "So I need to use this tournament and this West Coast Swing to really hit the ground and run so I can kind of plan the rest of my year accordingly, versus chasing." — Reuters

Hungry for more victories

Rahm prefers titles over consistency this year

LOS ANGELES: World number one Jon Rahm says he would happily swap consistency for more victories as he opens his 2022 campaign at the Sentry Tournament of Champions in Hawaii this week.

The Spaniard heads a star-studded field at the PGA Tour's calendar-year opening tournament in Maui following a dazzling 2021 campaign which included a maiden major victory at the US Open as well as PGA Player of the Year honours.

The 27-year-old also garnered the Vardon Trophy and Byron Nelson Award for scoring average, a reflection of a remarkable consistency which included no fewer than 15 top-10 finishes.

Rahm said Tuesday he hopes to improve on those standards this year – but admits he would prefer to add to his collection of 13 professional wins where possible.

"My goal is always to do better each year," Rahm said.

"But I could tell you right now I would gladly take a bit more of inconsistency but have more than one win."

Rahm meanwhile is unfazed by his status as world number one, saying he does not feel like a marked man with the likes of second-ranked Collin Morikawa and former world number one Dustin Johnson (3) both on his tail.

"I'm number one because of how I played in the past, so if I want to stay here I got to keep playing at the level and trying to get better," Rahm said.

"At the end of the day, I focus on myself, right? I try to improve my game and improve my level of golf.

"If I can do that and play the way I know I can play, everything else should take care of itself. I'm not thinking constantly, 'Oh, he's No. 2 or he's coming for me, I need to do this or that.' No, I'm trying to play the best that I can and hopefully win a tournament." — AFP

That's the way!: Jon Rahm of Spain reacts to his putt on the 17th green during the final round of the US Open at Torrey Pines in June. — AP

Ebadot takes six as Bangladesh stun Kiwis

WELLINGTON: Seamer Ebadot Hossain took 6-46 as Bangladesh beat New Zealand for the first time in a Test match at the 16th attempt with a stunning eight-wicket victory over the world Test champions.

The victory at Mount Maunganui was among the biggest shocks in the history of Test cricket as one of the poorest performers in the longest format of the game snapped New Zealand's 17-match unbeaten streak on home soil.

While New Zealand had beaten all-comers at home since their last loss to South Africa in March 2017, Bangladesh had lost all 21 of their matches in New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and England since they started playing Test cricket in 2000.

Ebadot, a former volleyball player who had taken 11 wickets in his 10 previous Tests, led the way as the tourists dismissed the 'Black Caps' for 169 early on day five to leave them requiring 40 runs for a famous win.

After losing both openers in the chase, it was left to captain Mominul Haque and experienced batsman Mushfiqur Rahim to usher Bangladesh to their first win outside Asia.

"I can't describe it, it's unbelievable," Mominul said. — Reuters

February fight for Mayweather

DUBAI: Floyd Mayweather will take part in an exhibition fight on Feb 20 on a helipad atop the Burj Al Hotel in Dubai against an as yet unnamed opponent, Boxing Junkie reported.

The Hall of Fame boxer, who will turn 45 four days after the fight, has been targeting YouTuber Reshad 'Money Kicks' Belhasa as his opponent, according to media reports.

Mayweather retired in 2015 but returned to defeat Conor McGregor in 2017 and improve his professional record to 50-0.

His most recent fight was an exhibition bout in June against YouTuber-turned boxer Logan Paul, which ended in a tie.

"It's going to be a very special crowd, not too many people," Mayweather was quoted as saying. — Reuters

Effortless: LA Lakers forward LeBron James drives to the basket during the NBA game against the Sacramento Kings. — AP

James helps Lakers rally over Kings

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James made several clutch baskets in the waning minutes of the fourth quarter as the Los Angeles Lakers rallied from a late seven-point deficit to beat the Sacramento Kings 122-114.

James scored 14 of his team-high 31 points in the final quarter as the Lakers won for the fourth time in the last five games.

Los Angeles' Malik Monk also had a strong final quarter, scoring 11 of his 24 points in the last seven minutes of the contest in front of a crowd of 17,900 in Los Angeles.

Monk drained six three pointers in the game and James and Russell Westbrook put the finishing touches with layups in the final moments.

Westbrook finished with 19 points.

Reserve Talen Horton-Tucker also scored 19 points for the Lakers, who beat a Pacific Division team at home for the first time this season.

De'Aaron Fox scored 30 points and Buddy Hield added 26 with seven three-pointers for the Kings.

In Cleveland, Ja Morant scored the go-ahead basket with 22 seconds left in the fourth quarter to lift the Memphis Grizzlies to a 110-106 win over the Cleveland Cavaliers.

Morant scored six of his 26 points in the final minute as the Grizzlies won their sixth straight game.

"I don't fear nobody," said Morant. "If you are 7-foot-7 I don't care, I am coming straight at you."

Elsewhere, Devin Booker scored 33 points and Chris Paul finished with 11 points and 15 assists as the undermanned Phoenix Suns beat the New Orleans Pelicans 123-110.

In Toronto, Fred VanVleet scored 24 of his 33 points in the first half as the Toronto Raptors won their third straight game with a 129-104 victory over the San Antonio Spurs. — AFP

2nd DEATH ANNIVERSARY
IN LOVING MEMORY OF

DOB: 29.11.1931
DOD: 06.01.2020

Mdm Rengamah Narayanasamy (AMMA)

Your presence we miss,
Your memory we treasure,
Loving you always,
Forgetting you never

- Grieving Family

Spain and Poland power into ATP Cup semi-finals

SYDNEY: Roberto Bautista Agut swept past Serbia's Dusan Lajovic to steer Spain into the ATP Cup semi-finals, where they will meet Poland after world number nine Hubert Hurkacz overwhelmed Argentina's in-form Diego Schwartzman.

The winner between Daniil Medvedev's defending champions Russia or the Matteo Berrettini-led Italy, last year's finalists, will also book a last-four berth when they meet in Sydney today.

The outcome of Group C is more complicated with all four teams – Britain, Canada, Germany and the United States – still in contention. They also play today.

After Chile beat Norway earlier in the day, Spain only needed one win in their final Group A tie against 2020 champions Serbia to progress, and that came from the consistent Pablo Carreno Busta.

The world number 20 toppled Filip Krajinovic 6-3, 6-4 for his third consecutive win of the season before Bautista Agut, ranked one place above his teammate, rubbed salt in Serbia's wounds by cruising past Lajovic 6-1, 6-4. — AFP

Why the double standard?

Djokovic's jab exemption sparks backlash in Australia

In focus: American Coco Gauff hits a return to Ashleigh Barty of Australia during their second round match at the Adelaide International. — AFP

MELWBOURNE: Australians reacted with fury yesterday after world number one Novak Djokovic received a medical exemption from having a Covid vaccine in order to play at this month's Australian Open.

Tournament chief Craig Tiley said that the defending champion had been given "no special favour" but urged the Serb to reveal why he got the exemption to soothe public anger.

All participants at the first Grand Slam of 2022, which starts on Jan 17, must be vaccinated against Covid-19 or have a medical exemption, which is granted only after assessment by two panels of independent experts.

The nine-time Australian Open champion announced late Tuesday he was en route to Melbourne with "an exemption permission", ending the drawn-out saga over whether he would defend his title.

But Stephen Parnis, a former Australian Medical Association vice-president, said it sent an "appalling message" to people trying to stop the spread of Covid-19.

"I don't care how good a tennis player he is. If he's refusing to get vaccinated, he shouldn't be allowed in," Parnis said on Twitter.

Australian Prime Minster Scott Morrison said that if the reasons for Djokovic's exemption were "insufficient" then the Serb would be "on the next plane home".

"We await his presentation and what evidence he provides us to support (his exemption)," Morrison told a press conference.

"If that evidence is insufficient, then he won't be treated any different to anyone else and will be on the next plane home. There should be no special rules for Novak Djokovic at all. None whatsoever."

Former Australian ATP Tour player Sam Groth, now a television commentator, said it was "a decision that spits in the face of every Victorian and Australian" in a column in *Herald Sun* newspaper.

There was also outrage on the streets of Melbourne.

"I think it's disgusting. I think he should have made his mind up before now and it shouldn't be a last-minute decision to get him in," resident Ron Wilson told AFP.

Other residents of the Victoria state city were more sympathetic, with Morteza Yari saying: "I think as long as the exemption is valid and they have valid reasons I don't see a problem with that."

Among the conditions allowing entry without a vaccine is if a person has had Covid-19 in the past six months. It has not been revealed if that was the case with Djokovic.

Tiley said the two panels assessed each exemption without knowing the identity of the applicant and he did not know under what grounds Djokovic got the green light, which is confidential.

"It will certainly be helpful if Novak was to explain the conditions in which he sought and was granted an exemption," Tiley said, acknowledging the backlash.

"I would encourage him to talk to the community about it ... we have been through a very tough period over the last two years and would appreciate some answers to that."

Groth agreed that Djokovic should reveal why he has been allowed in.

"You're willing to say you have an exemption but not willing to say why? It's sick hypocrisy. I don't like it at all," Groth wrote.

Some players expressed surprise with the exemption, including British doubles player Jamie Murray, who said at the ATP Cup in Sydney: "I think if it was me that wasn't vaccinated, I wouldn't be getting an exemption." — AFP

Barty outlasts Gauff in Adelaide

ADELAIDE: World number one Ash Barty was plagued by unforced errors but displayed plenty of fight on her return to the WTA Tour, as she rallied from a set down to beat American Coco Gauff 4-6, 7-5, 6-1 at the Adelaide International.

Barty, the 2020 Adelaide champion, last played competitively at the US Open in September before heading home to Australia and appeared rusty at times in the contest before mounting a brilliant comeback to reach the quarter-finals.

A delicate drop shot from the baseline helped Gauff break for a 2-1 lead in the opening set and although the 17-year-old failed to build on the early advantage, she capitalised on a number of loose errors by Barty to close out the set.

Barty saved four breakpoints in the opening game of the next set before world number 22 Gauff sealed a break to go up 4-2 but the local favourite clawed her way back to force a decider.

She raced ahead 5-1 after a scrappy start to the final set and completed the victory with a powerful volley.

Earlier, world number 100 Kaja Juvan beat second seed Aryna Sabalenka 7-6 (8-6), 6-1 while Shelby Rogers knocked out Maria Sakkari 7-6 (7-5), 2-6, 6-4.

■ **MELBOURNE:** Two-time Grand Slam champion Simona Halep began her preparation for this month's Australian Open with a 6-4, 6-2 win over local qualifier Destanee Aiava in the Melbourne Summer Set 1 tournament.

The former world number one, who was troubled by a calf issue that forced her out of last year's French Open, Wimbledon and the Tokyo Olympics, showed no signs of the problem in her 78-minute stay on Rod Laver Arena.

Trailing 3-4 in the first set, Romanian Halep switched gears to take the next five games before finishing in style.

She will take on compatriot Elena-Gabriela Ruse in the second round.

In the men's ATP 250 tournament, Lithuanian qualifier Ricardas Berankis defeated American Marcos Giron 7-5, 6-4 and will provide the opposition for Spaniard Rafa Nadal in his first four match since August. — Reuters

Sainz wins Dakar third stage as Nasser extends lead

QAISUMAH (Saudi Arabia): Carlos Sainz won the third stage of the Dakar Rally to mark the first success of Audi's new hybrid car in the gruelling road trip in the Saudi Arabian desert.

While Sainz, 59 and a three-time Dakar winner, celebrated his 40th career stage win Nasser Al-Attiyah tightened his grip on the overall lead.

The Qatari, on the hunt for his fourth title, pulled 37 minutes clear of Sebastien Loeb, who lost a chunk of time when his car's prop shaft broke.

The nine-time world rally champion limped to the finish line after 255 kilometres around Al Qaisumah in 37th place.

"It was a bad day," the French rally veteran said.

"We only had front wheel drive from ten kilometres after the start. We did 250 km like this. Crossing the dunes and all the difficult conditions we had with this two-wheel drive was really tough."

On a roll: Argentinian driver Lucio Alvarez competing during Stage 3 of the Dakar Rally. — AFP

Sainz took the day's honours by over half a minute from South African Henrik Lategan with Dakar legend Stephane Peterhansel guiding his Audi hybrid into third.

Sainz, almost two-and-a-half hours adrift in 26th overall, commented: "We have been driving fast and learning about the car. It's the first race and we are getting used to it."

Al-Attiyah came in eighth, with Loeb now trailing by 37min40sec.

Meanwhile, French prosecutors said they had opened a terrorism investigation into an explosion that went off under a French on Dec 30.

The blast, which seriously injured one of the rally competitors, hit a support vehicle belonging to the French team Sodicars soon after it left its hotel in the Saudi city of Jeddah for the race route, according to accounts from the team and race organisers.

Five team members were in the vehicle at the time and one of them – driver Philippe Boutron – sustained serious leg injuries. French newspaper *L'Equipe* quoted a teammate as saying the blast ripped through the floor of the vehicle, which then caught fire. — Agencies

RESULTS WORLDWIDE

BASKETBALL

NBA CHAMPIONSHIPS

Memphis 110 Cleveland 106, Toronto *129 San Antonio 104, New York 104 Indiana 94, Phoenix 123 New Orleans 110, LA Lakers 122 Sacramento 114.

TENNIS

ADELAIDE INTERNATIONAL

Second round: Kaja Juvan (Slo) bt Aryna Sabalenka (Blr) 7-6 (8-6), 6-1; Elena Rybakina (Kaz) bt Marie Bouzkova (Cze) 6-3, 6-4; Shelby Rogers (US) Maria Sakkari (Gre) 7-6 (7-5), 2-6, 6-4; Ashleigh Barty (Aus) bt Coco Gauff (US) 4-6, 7-5, 6-1.

GREAT OCEAN ROAD OPEN

First round: Ricardas Berankis (Ltu) bt Marcos Giron (US) 7-5, 6-4; Jordan Thompson (Aus) bt Christopher O'Connell (Aus) 1-6, 7-5, 6-4; Emil Ruusuvuori (Fin) bt Sebastian Baez (Arg) 7-6 (7-2), 6-1; Henri Laaksonen (Swi) bt Benoit Paire (Fra) 4-6, 6-3, 7-2 rtd; Maxime Cressy (US) bt Rinky Hijikata (Aus) 6-3, 6-0; Alex Molcan (Svk) bt Andreas Seppi (Ita) 6-4, 6-7 (6-8), 6-3; Alexei Popyrin (Aus) bt Stefano Travaglia (Ita) 7-6 (7-5), 6-3; Jaume Munar (Spa) bt Kevin Anderson (Rsa) 6-4, 6-4.

YARRA VALLEY CLASSIC

Second round: Veronika Kudermetova (Rus) bt Viktoria Kuzmova (Svk) 7-6 (7-4), 7-6 (8-6); Qiwen Zheng (Chn) bt Mai Hontama (Jpn) 4-6, 6-2, 6-3; Anastasia Potapova (Rus) bt Lizette Cabrera (Aus) 5-7, 6-2, 6-2; Clara Burel (Fra) bt Zhang Shuai (Chn) 6-3, 7-6 (8-6); Lesley Pattinama Kerkhove (Ned) bt Sesil Mendez (Aus) 6-3, 6-4; Anna Bondar (Hun) bt Katerina Siniakova (Cze) 7-5, 7-6 (10-8); Madison Brengle (US) bt Nao Hibino (Jpn) 7-6 (7-3), 7-6 (7-4).

Crunch time for Juve

Old Lady face key month as Serie A restarts under virus cloud

MILAN: Juventus begin a crucial month for the season with the visit of old rivals Napoli as Serie A returns to action, with a Covid-19 resurgence looming large over fixtures.

Dozens of players among the top division's 20 clubs are out of action with the virus, with Juventus captain Giorgio Chiellini one of those sidelined after testing positive and 15 new cases among Verona and Udinese's squads announced.

And the rapid spread of the virus has led to stadium capacities being cut back to 50% as the Italian government tries to keep the lid on another wave of the pandemic.

Napoli coming to town marks the start of a run of tricky fixtures for Massimiliano Allegri's side, who are fifth, a full 12 points behind league leaders and reigning champions Inter Milan.

They also have to take on AS Roma, AC Milan and Atalanta – who are four points ahead of Juventus in the final Champions League spot – all before mid-February.

Chiellini's absence and injury to his club and Italy defensive partner Leonardo Bonucci leaves Juventus shorn of two of their most influential players, while in attack Paulo Dybala and Federico Chiesa will be on the bench after recovering from injury.

Napoli will arrive in Turin with a long absentee list, largely thanks to players at the African Nations Cup and Covid-19 cases, with coach Luciano Spalletti set to stay at home with the virus after testing positive on Tuesday.

Star striker Victor Osimhen, who has already missed a chunk of fixtures with facial fractures, is also positive alongside Hirving Lozano, Eljif Elmas, Kevin Malcuit and Mario Rui, who is, however, suspended for today's match.

Spalletti's side have a seven-point gap to make up on Inter after a disastrous December in which they ceded top spot and dropped down to third following three straight home defeats, and are also without defensive lynchpin Kalidou Koulibaly and Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa, both at the Nations Cup. — AFP

Lens beat Lille on penalties to reach French Cup last 16

LENS: Captain Seko Fofana equalised in the last seconds of injury time and then scored the winning penalty in a shootout as Lens beat northern rivals Lille to reach the last 16 of the French Cup.

Belgian midfielder Amadou Onana scored his first goals for Lille to put the visitors up 2-0 at half-time, but Fofana grabbed his second deep into the fifth minute of stoppage time to make it 2-2 and forced a shootout.

Lille's veteran captain Jose Fonte dragged his penalty wide. Lens defender Jonathan Clauss had his shot saved, only for Portugal midfielder Renato Sanches to see his effort stopped. That gave Fofana a chance to win it and his scuffed effort went in off the left post to make it 4-3 on penalties.

Yusuf Yazici had hit the crossbar early on for Lille when offseason signing Onana headed in from close range in the 29th minute, after Lens failed to clear Tiago Djalo's cross from the right flank.

Lille profited from another swift counter-attack four minutes later when Onana scored from Jonathan Bamba's pass.

Fofana pulled one back midway through the second half, driving a shot inside the post, and his strike from the edge of the penalty area went in off the post – a sign of things to come.

The teams are closely matched in the league table, with defending champions Lille in eighth place and Lens one point behind in ninth at the halfway stage of the season.

There were only 5,000 fans because of coronavirus restrictions, and there were no Lille fans allowed after violent disorder during their league game in September.

It was interrupted for about 30 minutes when fans from the northern rivals clashed at half-time.

A large group of Lens supporters ran to the away section where they fought with Lille fans in the latest violent incident to mar French football this season. — AP

Watch out!: Lille's Jose Fonte (left) is challenged by Lens' Cheick Doucoure during the French Cup match. — AFP

Eriksen eyes W-Cup return

COPENHAGEN: Denmark's Christian Eriksen ***(pic)***, who went into cardiac arrest at the European Championships and has since been fitted with a pacemaker, hopes to play in the World Cup in Qatar, he said in a Danish television interview.

Eriksen terminated his contract with Inter Milan by mutual consent in December, as Italian League rules bar players with pacemakers.

"I want to play football. There's no reason not to do that," Eriksen said in an excerpt released on Tuesday of a longer interview to be aired later this week on public broadcaster DR.

"They (the doctors) have said it's fine. They've said it's 'good'.

"So everything is stable, and it feels like I've got the green light to play football again.

"My goal is to play in the World Cup in Qatar" in November-December 2022, he said, adding: "Whether I can get selected is something entirely different ... but ... I can come back."

The former Tottenham player suffered a cardiac arrest in Denmark's opening game at Euro 2020 against Finland in Copenhagen on June 12 and had to be resuscitated on the pitch.

Denmark then rode a wave of emotion at the tournament, reaching the semi-finals.

The playmaker spent several days in hospital and had a pacemaker implanted to regulate his heartbeat.

He has recently been in training with his boyhood club Odense.

According to the Danish daily *B.T.*, Eriksen mainly focused on physical exercises and also trained with a ball, although this is not currently with a view to playing for them.

"Christian Eriksen is using the pitch for his rehabilitation" but "he is not training with our team", Odense's communications officer Rasmus Nejstgaard said last month. — AFP

Conte waiting on Spurs transfer talks

LONDON: Tottenham manager Antonio Conte said he is still waiting to hold talks with club chiefs over their plans for the January transfer window.

Conte intends to speak to chairman Daniel Levy and managing director of football Fabio Paratici about how to bolster his squad during the current window, which opened on Saturday.

Conte took charge of the north London club in November following the sacking of Nuno Espirito Santo after a 3-0 home defeat by Manchester United, and said then that he wanted time to evaluate his players

"My expectation is to speak with my club and then to tell them my opinions," Conte said.

"This is only my expectation and after I speak to the club, they will make the decisions they want to make."

In his brief spell in charge, the 52-year-old Italian has yet to lose an English Premier League match, guiding Spurs to sixth, just two points shy of the top four who will qualify for next season's Champions League.

Conte downplayed the possible impact of the coronavirus pandemic on transfer activity, amid concerns some clubs might not spend as much as usual given the impact of decreased revenues as a result of playing matches behind closed doors or, alternatively, would hold onto players they might otherwise sell in case of a fresh outbreak. — AFP

Sarr heads to Nations Cup after Watford standoff

LONDON: Watford midfielder Ismaila Sarr has been released by his club to join up with Senegal's squad for the African Nations Cup Finals, ending a standoff between club and country.

The Senegal Football Federation said in a statement that Sarr had left London on Tuesday to join up with the squad, after initially not being released by the English Premier League club.

Watford said that Sarr was injured and not fit to compete after being accused of stopping the player from going to this month's tournament in Cameroon.

Senegal accused Watford of providing "spurious" reasons for denying Sarr permission to travel but the Premier League club invited the Senegalese to send their own doctor to assess his injury.

Senegal said they would seek FIFA's intervention and demanded the winger's release to join the rest of the squad who are preparing in Dakar.

FIFA rules state that any player called up for international duty must be released, even if injured, so that he might be assessed by his country's own medical team.

Senegal had already named Sarr in their squad for the tournament, which kicks off on Sunday.

They play their first game in Group B on Monday against Zimbabwe in Bafoussam. — Reuters

Lukaku: I'm sorry

Forward apologises for Chelsea 'unhappy' comments

LONDON: Chelsea forward Romelu Lukaku ***(pic)*** said he was "sorry" after saying he was "not happy" at the club under manager Thomas Tuchel.

The Belgium forward's interview with Sky Sport Italia, filmed early last month, was published today.

Tuchel then dropped the 28-year-old, who has suffered from injury and Covid-19 this season, for Sunday's draw with Liverpool.

"To the fans, I'm sorry for the upset that I've caused," Lukaku told Chelsea's website.

"Obviously it's up to me now to restore your trust, and I'll do my best every day to show commitment on the training ground and in games to make sure we win games.

"And also to the manager, my teammates and the board, I apologise, because I think it was not the right moment, also.

"And I want to move forward from this and make sure that we start winning football games and make sure that I start performing for the team in the best manner," he added.

> ***"Obviously it's up to me now to restore your trust, and I'll do my best every day to show commitment on the training ground ..."***
>
> Romelu Lukaku

Chelsea paid £98mil (RM557mil) for the ex-Manchester United attacker, who spent three seasons at Stamford Bridge earlier in his career.

Lukaku told the Italian broadcaster he wanted to return to Inter Milan.

"I think I should have been much clearer in my message to be honest," said Lukaku.

"The interview was about saying goodbye to the Inter fans, it was not about trying to disrespect the (Chelsea) fans, the football club, the owner, my teammates, the technical staff. Because they made a lot of effort for me to come back here and I wanted to come back here.

"So for me, I came here when I was 18 and it didn't go so well. Now I'm back at 28 in the prime years of my career – I can't really mess this up," he added.

Earlier in the day, Tuchel said he had accepted an apology from Lukaku.

"First of all, we were even in the background happy that we took the time that it needed to look calmly on it and talk calmly," Tuchel said.

"He apologised and is back in the squad. He did not do this intentionally to create noise in front of such a big game.

"And it's the very first time he has behaved like this."

Tuchel tried to put the interview in perspective by saying: "It's not that big as maybe people want it to be, but it's also not small.

"But it is small enough to stay calm, accept an apology and to move forward. He's aware of what happened and what he created and he feels the responsibility to clean up the mess.

"Maybe we will have a bit of smell still from it, of course.

"He can handle it, but he also has no other choice. He cannot expect everybody to be super happy the very next day." — AFP

Solak's Sport Republic buys S'hampton

LONDON: Southampton have been taken over by Serbian businessman Dragan Solak's Sport Republic investment firm, the English Premier League club announced.

Sport Republic, which specialise in sport and entertainment investments, have purchased the 80% shareholding in the south coast side previously owned by Jisheng Gao.

But while the Chinese businessman, who purchased his stake in 2017, is bowing out, Katharina Liebherr has retained her 20% share in the Saints.

Solak is the lead investor in London-based Sport Republic, a company founded by Rasmus Ankersen – who recently stepped down as Brentford co-director of football – and Henrik Kraft.

"My partners and I have experience in long-term investments in the sports and entertainment industry and Sport Republic has been founded to combine this expertise and deliver something unique to the market," said Solak in a Southampton statement.

"Southampton have so many of the qualities we have been looking for in a major sports organisation."

The Saints are currently 14th in the Premier League, 10 points above the relegation zone. — AFP

United manager role in danger of becoming 'impossible job'

LONDON: Despite their frustrations, Manchester United fans never booed managers Ole Gunnar Solskjaer or Jose Mourinho – but Ralf Rangnick heard the full displeasure of the Old Trafford crowd.

The German's decision to substitute Mason Greenwood on the hour provoked loud booing from supporters who had seen the young forward provide the few moments of quality in what had been another dull display from United.

It was a vocal criticism of a specific decision, but it also reflected broader concerns that, after improved performances following the dismissal of Solskjaer in November, the quality of United's displays has been going backwards under the interim manager.

That feeling only intensified after Wolves went on to win the game 1-0 for their first victory at Old Trafford in 40 years.

In many ways, it is an absurd situation – after all, Rangnick has only been in charge for five league matches and this was his first defeat.

But apart from the opening half hour of his debut game against Crystal Palace, there has been little sign of the high-energy, pressing football for which Rangnick was heralded during his time in the Bundesliga.

It's not looking good: The quality of Manchester United's display has been going backwards under interim manager Ralf Rangnick (second from right). — Reuters

Against Wolves, the team looked tactically confused, without any direction and they played with little spirit – as acknowledged by fullback Luke Shaw after the match.

The club had also expected a degree of continuity when they appointed Rangnick with the hope that he could develop the younger coaches that assisted Solskjaer.

But former player Michael Carrick, who had been caretaker manager, quit on the day the German took charge and then first-team coach Kieran McKenna left to take charge of third-tier Ipswich Town, taking along United colleague Martyn Pert as his assistant.

Rangnick, who brought in American former New York Red Bulls coach Chris Armas to assist him, has been placed in charge of the team until the end of this season but he also has a longer-term role as a consultant and will be involved in deciding who the next manager should be.

Although he cheekily suggested at his first press conference that he might end up recommending himself, it is his experience as a director of football, creating the right training ground and performance related structures that was the main attraction to the club.

The danger is that if Rangnick's time on the bench sours his relationship with the fans and damages his broader reputation in the game, it may undermine his eventual broader role and the search for his replacement.

What the failures of Mourinho and Solskjaer and Rangnick's early difficulties highlight is that the United squad need over-hauling, with better and fresher talent brought in and some of the older or sub-standard players moved on. — Reuters

Liverpool request to postpone Arsenal tie

LONDON: Liverpool have asked the English Football League (EFL) to reschedule the first leg of their League Cup semi-final against Arsenal today due to a rising number of Covid-19 cases at the club, the English Premier League team said.

Liverpool cancelled Tuesday's first-team training session.

"The Reds have formally requested to the EFL that the fixture is rescheduled after further suspected positive tests were registered among players and staff, allied to other factors impacting selection, including illness and injury," the club said in a statement.

"Among the consideration which led to today's application to the EFL is the need for travelling supporters to be given as much notice as possible of any potential postponement."

Manager Juergen Klopp, along with goalkeeper Alisson Becker, forward Roberto Firmino and defender Joel Matip were ruled out of the 2-2 draw against Chelsea at the weekend after returning with positive tests.

Virgil van Dijk, Thiago Alcantara, Fabinho and Curtis Jones were also forced into isolation last month. — Reuters

Roar, Hodak, roar

KL will gladly let coach leave to helm Harimau Malaya

By T. AVINESHWARAN

PETALING JAYA: For Bojan Hodak to be linked with the national team comes as no surprise.

The Kuala Lumpur coach is one of the most respected figures in the local game, thanks to his successes with various clubs.

At Kelantan, he won the Super League in 2012 and FA Cup twice in 2012 and 2013.

Then he joined Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT) and the Southern Tigers won the Super League in 2014 and Charity Shield the following year.

> ***"His love for this country is massive. His wife is Malaysian, so this is home for him."***
>
> Stanley Bernard

The Croatian also has some experience handling a national team.

He handled the Malaysian Under-19 from 2017 to 2019 and they won the AFF Under-19 Youth Championship in 2018.

And last year, he steered underdogs Kuala Lumpur to beat star-studded JDT in the Malaysia Cup final.

Impressive feat: Bojan Hodak steered underdogs Kuala Lumpur to beat star-studded JDT in the Malaysia Cup final.

Football fans also agree that the burly no-nonsense Hodak is the right man to lead the Harimau Malaya thanks to his knowledge of Malaysian football and its players.

Even Kuala Lumpur chief executive officer Stanley Bernard revealed that they will not stand in Hodak's way if there is an interest from the Football Association of Malaysia.

"It is not a conversation that happened only today. When I played under him, we did have these chats. As a coach, he is ambitious and has target," said Stanley.

"His love for this country is massive. His wife is Malaysian, so this is home for him.

"If there is an opportunity to coach Malaysia, he would surely consider it.

"For now, his focus is on Kuala Lumpur. But if the call comes, we will be supportive of it. I'm a Malaysian first before anything."

If Hodak does move, Stanley said they could promote his assistant and compatriot Nenad Bacina.

O'Donell has three years to get Malaysia back on track

PETALING JAYA: Twenty years ago, Scott O'Donell donned the red and white jersey of Kuala Lumpur from 1994 to 1995.

Known as the Liga Perdana (Premier League) then, the Australian was impressed with the media coverage, fan atmosphere and most importantly the standard of football.

And he believed that Malaysia could make an impact on the international stage.

However, things have not been rosy since his absence.

But O'Donell is back ... and plans to do something about it as the Football Association of Malaysia's (FAM) technical director.

"Now I have a lot more grey hair than back then," joked the 54-year-old yesterday.

"When I played in Malaysia, I thought they could be the next big thing. The stadiums were packed. The newspapers had five to six pages adorned with league news and a summary every Monday. You had a feeling it would take off.

"Unfortunately, after more than 20 years, it has not taken off. But, we have the ingredients to make it work.

"We have to prioritise things, especially competitions among the youths. I sense that is lacking in this region."

O'Donell was a coach at Singapore's Geylang United from 2003-2005 and handled the Cambodian national team twice from 2005-2007 and 2009-2010.

He then went on to become a technical director with the All-India Football Federation (AIFF) from 2015-2017.

During the press conference, he emphasised on the need to increase more matches for youngsters citing South America as an example. He said the youths there play at least 40 games a year.

"We have to set high standards and be a bit more demanding. We need to increase the number of competitive games. There will be no development if there is no competition," he said.

"It's good to see Liga Suparimau held in seven states and the President and Belia Cups can be better. It would be easier to work if we had these competitions going well.

"We would have a better chance of enlarging the pool of players. We must get kids into football.

"When I was in quarantine, I saw a bunch of kids – about 20 of them – playing in a horrible field under the rain. But they were having fun. We must get that feeling."

O'Donell wants to continue FAM's F:30, a 12-year road map, to transform Malaysia into a force to be reckoned with by 2030.

"It is a good plan but it must be a living document. We must continue evolving according to time and do not lose focus on the programme," he said.

"I've three years to do that. There will be no quick fixes but I will get everyone on board to engage in the betterment of Malaysian football."

Familiar face: Newly-appointed FAM technical director Scott O'Donell speaking at a press conference at Wisma FAM. — Bernama

Cools back in Belgian League in search of game time

PETALING JAYA: Malaysian international Dion Cools returns to the Belgian League in search of valuable playing minutes.

The rightback will be looking for more playing opportunities as he has joined SV Zulte Waregem on a six-month loan deal from Danish club Midtjylland.

This season, the 25-year-old, who was hampered by injury, has been used sparingly and started only five times in the Danish Superliga.

Cools made his professional debut in the Belgian Pro League with Club Brugge in 2015.

He played for them until 2019 before moving to Denmark.

Cools sees the opportunity with his new club as a stepping stone to prove his worth and help the club realise their full potential.

"I see myself as a modern rightback who likes to help in defence and attack," said Cools in a statement issued by the club. "Zulte are a contemporary and warm club that despite the lesser results of the past months, they always strive to achieve their healthy ambitions and hopefully I can be a part of that."

For the record, Zulte were twice winners of the Belgian Cup.

Their highest finish in the league was second place in 2012–2013.

They qualified for the UEFA Cup in 2006–2007 and the Europa League in 2013–2014 and 2017–2018.

They are currently struggling and are 16th in the 18-team standings.

They are just a spot above the relegation zone and hope that with Dion's addition, they will survive the drop.

The club's general manager Eddy Cordier believes the loanee will make an immediate impact.

"Dion knows the competition and is 100% physically and mentally ready and is an essential reinforcement for our defensive compartment."

Ex-Malaysia keeper Hamid dies at 68

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's goalkeeper for the 1976 and 1980 Asia Cup, Hamid Ramli, has passed on due to heart complications yesterday. He was 68.

The Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) in a Facebook posting confirmed his death.

"Our deepest condolences to his family. May Allah bless and place his soul among the righteous. He was initially called up to join the national squad by the late Jalil Che Din in 1975 and was chosen as the second goalkeeper to R. Arumugam in the final of the Asia Cup in 1976," FAM said.

Hamid eventually become the country's main goalkeeper in 1979 and helped Malaysia advance to the final of the 1980 Asia Cup in Kuwait.

They also won the Pestabola Merdeka in 1979 and bagged the gold at the Jakarta SEA Games in that same year.

Due to work commitments, Hamid withdrew from the 1980 pre-Olympic squad.

In the domestic league, he played for Kelantan from 1974 and then moved to Sarawak in 1985. He spent two seasons there before announcing his retirement.

He went on to become a goalkeeper coach for several teams including Kelantan, Armed Forces, KM Naza, Police and Negri Sembilan. – Bernama

Jun Hoong plans to make a splash away from pool

By LIM TEIK HUAT

PETALING JAYA: Diving has been her life for the last 22 years but Cheong Jun Hoong is likely to detach herself from the sport completely.

The former world champion, who announced her retirement on Tuesday, admitted that right now she does not have any plans for the future.

"Honestly, I don't have one as I didn't make any. Of course I feel sad and there are some regrets as I have been involved in diving for a long time," said the 31-year-old from Perak.

"All those time my focus was to give my 200% for the country.

"As for the future, I don't think I'll be staying on in the industry, at least not for now.

"This is actually a good time for me to take a nice long break as I didn't really have the energy to think about anything else all this while.

"And I don't really have a lot of hobbies as diving has been my entire life.

"Maybe, I'll take some courses, learn and enhance myself and see what opportunities swing my way," said Jun Hoong, who holds a Bachelor of Communication from Universiti Putra Malaysia.

Jun Hoong became Malaysia's first world champion in aquatics when she stunned the top divers from China to win the 10m platform individual in the 2017 World Championships in Budapest, Hungary.

Jun Hoong is also a 10m platform synchro silver medallist with Pandelela Rinong at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

She also won gold with Pandelela at the Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast in 2018.

In 2018, she underwent surgeries on her knees that kept her out for nearly three years and has since found it tough to get back to her former form.

Jun Hoong is the highest profile casualty to be axed following the National Sports Council's decision to downsize the number of full-time athletes from 432 to 288 due to budget cuts.

"While sad, I'm actually grateful for everything that they have done for me over the years.

"I also want to thank the media for their kind coverage throughout my career."

Brainy sportsman: Olympian Cheong Jun Hoong holding her degree during Universiti Putra Malaysia Convocation ceremony in 2019.

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3RD PRIZE 1590

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6630	5795	6675	5963
6997	1616	5030	1057
8582	2716	9841	2732
8124	8946	7415	6826

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Jackpot 1 RM 3,883,234.63

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9925 + 2544 | 9925 + 1590
1590 + 2544 | 1590 + 9925

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BONUS NUMBERS

29 35

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GROUP 2 44259 OR 42590
GROUP 3 4425 OR 2590
GROUP 4 442 OR 590
GROUP 5 44 OR 90
OR 25

GOLDEN NUMBER 05

Jackpot 1 RM 7,210,223.90

Jackpot 1 - Group 1 + Golden Number

Jackpot 2 RM 259,519.86

Jackpot 2 - Group 2 + Golden Number

All jackpot amounts stated above are for this Draw. Subject to T&Cs of the Scheme. Please visit to www.magnumtoto.my for more info. Let's play responsibly and keep it fun.

Cut down to size

NSC: National athletes to get less allowance this year

By TAN MING WAI

KUALA LUMPUR: National athletes will now have less in their pockets this year.

This comes after the National Sports Council (NSC), badly hit by the budget cuts, are forced to revert to their old allowance structure.

For instance, silver and bronze medallists at this year's Asian and Commonwealth Games will now take home RM4,000 and RM3,500 monthly rather than the previous flat rate of RM4,500 which is what the gold medallist will now receive.

NSC director general Datuk Ahmad Shapawi Ismail stressed that the adjustment was necessary to spend within their means but also to ensure fairness among the top achievers.

"Due to the lower allocation from the government for the athletes' preparation programme this year, we're forced to make necessary adjustments to the allowance scheme," said Shapawi.

"We decided to reinstate the 2018 scheme which pays athletes based on their achievements.

"Previously (2018-2021) those who won bronze were paid the same rate as the gold medallists.

"This was unfair to those who won gold. Similarly, it also didn't help the fact that it created a situation whereby silver and bronze medal winners have less motivation to improve themselves."

Asked if this new scheme would cause dissatisfaction, Shapawi replied: "We're not hiring athletes to work for us. Our main priority is to provide them with all the necessary platform to take their career to greater heights such as a place to train, coaching and support services.

"Let's not forget, the training allowance they receive is on top of the accommodation, meals, transport, medical and many other benefits.

"Those who're employed (outside) still earn their salary while some athletes are also getting paid extra by their respective associations.

"We hope that the athletes will understand the predicaments that the country is facing.

"Our country is in the recovery process after being badly affected by Covid-19 as well as the recent floods and in need massive funding."

NSC announced that a total of 293 athletes – comprising 248 able-bodied and 45 para athletes – have been retained for this year's programme.

There were a total of 432 able-bodied and 114 para athletes under the previous programme.

The national back-up programme saw only 178 retained compared to 260 last year.

For para sports, 22 new athletes have been called up. There was no back-up programme for para sports last year.

THE REVISED ALLOWANCE SCHEME

OLYMPIC GAMES: RM7,500, RM7,000, RM6,500

ASIAN AND COMMONWEALTH GAMES: RM4,500, RM4,000, RM3,500

SEA GAMES: RM2,000, RM800 *(for silver and bronze)*

NON-MEDALLISTS: RM800

BACK-UP: RM500

New pay: SEA Games 100m defending champion Haiqal Hanafi will be among the athletes affected by the new allowance scheme.

Brothers proud to represent Malaysia in sim racing

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysia Esports Federation (MESF) have chosen siblings Naquib Azlan and Nabil Azlan to compete in the IUEM eRacing GP by RaceRoom, which is part of the South-East Asia eSports Championships (SEA EC).

This will be the first time sim racing will be held at the SEA EC.

Naquib and Nabil dominated the national qualifiers on Jan 3 by taking the top two spots.

Naquib, the older brother, is a two-time eRacing GP Gold Class champion while Nabil finished third in the Toyota Gazoo Racing Velocity Esports Championship last year.

"I'm super proud and honoured to represent Malaysia alongside Nabil. It's a great opportunity for us to show what we can do against some of the region's best," said Naquib.

The top two drivers from seven Asean countries will compete in the final on Sunday.

Former Formula One driver and founder of eRacing GP, Alex Yoong said: "I'm really excited. It's the first time we have eRacing in the SEA EC so it's going to be interesting with all the countries from around the region sending their best drivers."

Competitors from each country will race in the Z-Challenger Audi RS3 in their nation's colours over three rounds on the day of competition.

The winners will receive prize money from a pool of US$10,000 (RM42,000) while fans will be able to catch the finals live on Astro's eGG network from 11.45am on Sunday.

There's no Goh-ing back now

Jin Wei picks professional outfit KLRC over national team

By TAN MING WAI

PETALING JAYA: Two-time world junior champion Goh Jin Wei has opted to become an independent player and will not return to the national team.

Yesterday, the 21-year-old officially signed for Kuala Lumpur Racquet Club (KLRC), a professional outfit, with former national shuttler Soong Joo Ven.

It is expected more will follow suit especially players from the now defunct Sports Affairs Academy.

KLRC manager Sairol Amar Ayob said they are delighted to welcome Jin Wei on board and will try their utmost best to make sure she qualifies for the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Sairol revealed that Jin Wei commenced training at their base in Cheras last week.

"She has signed for three years with the Olympics her main target," said Sairol, a former international.

"We're willing to invest in Jin Wei because we feel that she deserves a second chance.

"She's still very young and is eager to fight on. So, we're here to support her."

The move is not expected to go down well with the Badminton Association of Malaysia (BAM), who wanted Jin Wei to return to the national fold.

KLRC will have to negotiate with BAM for a solution because any participation in BWF-sanctioned tournaments need to be approved by the national body.

"I don't think there will be any problems. BAM president Tan Sri Norza (Zakaria) had previously stated that whether the players are competing independently or under BAM banner, they are all still representing the country," explained Sairol.

"It's for the betterment of our badminton so I don't see why they should stop or block a player (from competing)."

Sairol added that a press conference will be held soon to announce their new signings.

For the time being, Jin Wei and Joo Ven will train under Indonesian Nova Armada, the former Sports Affairs Academy coach.

Formed in 2005, KLRC previously boast of a notable line-up that comprised the likes of Hafiz Hashim, Fairuzizuan Tazari, Zakry Latif, Gan Teik Chai and Tan Bin Shen.

Time to get busy: Goh Jin Wei commenced training at the KLRC's base in Cheras last week.

Ervin aims to bag SEA Games medal before turning professional

PETALING JAYA: National No. 2 amateur golfer Ervin Chang ***(pic)*** expects a perfect farewell present from this year's SEA Games in Vietnam.

The 23-year-old will be making his final appearance in the regional Games and eyes a podium finish before turning pro.

Ervin had wanted to join the play-for-pay ranks earlier after graduating with a sports management degree in 2020 but put his plans on hold due to Covid-19.

He is now looking to kick off his professional career in the second half of the year.

But first, Ervin wants a medal at the Games which start from May 12-23.

He narrowly missed out when he came in fourth when the Philippines hosted the biennial Games in 2019.

In his debut in Kuala Lumpur 2017, Ervin finished eighth.

"I came close in Manila, so I certainly want to make amends," said Ervin. "I'm planning to head home (from the United States) around April to prepare for the Games.

"However, I'm still waiting if I get a call up from the MGA (Malaysian Golf Association).

"I've stayed long enough in the amateur world and I think it's time to move on."

Ervin is certainly giving MGA a reason to pick him as he has been enjoying a fine run lately. He ended 2021 with a bang, notably finishing as runner-up at the Sunshine State Amateur championship in Florida.

He also came in eighth at the Country Club of North Carolina Amateur and 20th at the Orlando International Amateur.

WINNING NUMBERS damacai

Draw Date: 05/01/22 (Wed) Draw No: 5846/22 Venue: PERAK TURF CLUB

1+3D SUPER1+3D

1st Prize 1752
2nd Prize 0958
3rd Prize 0761

Starters		Consolation	
9970	8712	9336	2485
8226	8761	8502	6793
3579	4456	3272	4279
8568	7212	4630	7975
2497	9381	1291	4959

1+3D

Jackpot 1 RM20,380,454.50

1752 + 0958	0958 + 1752
1752 + 0761	0761 + 1752
0958 + 0761	0761 + 0958

Jackpot 2 RM262,339.30

Winning pair matches any 1 of Top 3 & any 1 of 10 Starter Prizes.

3+3D Bonus

1st Prize 381 752 +	Bonus SNAKE	1st Prize Bonus RM1,273,333.30
2nd Prize 400 958 +	Bonus SNAKE	2nd Prize Bonus RM2,815,381.20
3rd Prize 980 761 +	Bonus DRAGON	3rd Prize Bonus RM830,000.00

Starters		Consolation	
279 970	508 712	769 336	922 485
488 226	378 761	918 502	166 793
523 579	044 456	553 272	244 279
148 568	307 212	834 630	487 975
622 497	889 381	311 291	344 959

3D

1st Prize	2nd Prize	3rd Prize
752	958	761

3D Jackpot

Jackpot RM1,459,330.40

752 + 958 + 761	958 + 761 + 752
752 + 761 + 958	761 + 752 + 958
958 + 752 + 761	761 + 958 + 752

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TOTO 4D PRIZE PAYMENTS GUARANTEED IN FULL

1st Prize	1 9 0 8
2nd Prize	2 1 3 7
3rd Prize	5 2 7 3

Special		Consolation	
2437	2899	3701	7323
4598	9067	6557	9490
4287	7719	7513	5414
3491	0709	5465	3137
9891	9711	4189	8423

4D JACKPOT

Jackpot 1 RM 5,911,777.00

1908	2137	2137	1908
1908	5273	5273	1908
2137	5273	5273	2137

Jackpot 2 RM 251,289.59

Winning combination of any 1 of Top 3 & any 1 of Special prizes.

4D Zodiac

1st Prize	1 9 0 8	+	
2nd Prize	2 1 3 7	+	
3rd Prize	5 2 7 3	+	O X
4th Prize	Special Prize	+	
5th Prize	Consolation Prize	+	
6th Prize	Any 4D drawn number		

TOTO 5D & 6D PRIZE PAYMENTS GUARANTEED IN FULL

5D: 1ST 5 6 5 1 4; 2ND 3 7 5 2 4; 3RD 2 7 7 2 6; 4TH 6 5 1 4; 5TH 5 1 4; 6TH 1 4

6D: 1ST 5 9 2 9 0 4; 2ND 5 9 2 9 0 or 9 2 9 0 4; 3RD 5 9 2 9 or 2 9 0 4; 4TH 5 9 2 or 9 0 4; 5TH 5 9 or 0 4

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Jackpot RM 8,266,121.34

STAR 9/46: 9 10 11 24 36 46 + 18
Jackpot 1 RM 6,331,614.62
Jackpot 2 RM 100,000.00

Toto 4D Jackpot 1 (i-System)
RM1,159,190
Star 6/50 Jackpot 2
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StarSport

Paris on my mind

It looks like Goh Jin Wei is not heading back to the Badminton Association of Malaysia's direction. Yesterday the two-time world junior champion, who came out of retirement on Sunday, signed a three-year contract with professional outfit Kuala Lumpur Racquet Club with the Olympic Games her main target.
> By **TAN MING WAI** on Page 27

Joker roasted over exemption. >22

Cools goes back to Belgium. >25

Hold on to your hat

Pablo Carreno Busta hits a return against Filip Krajinovic during their ATP Cup Group A match in Sydney. — AFP

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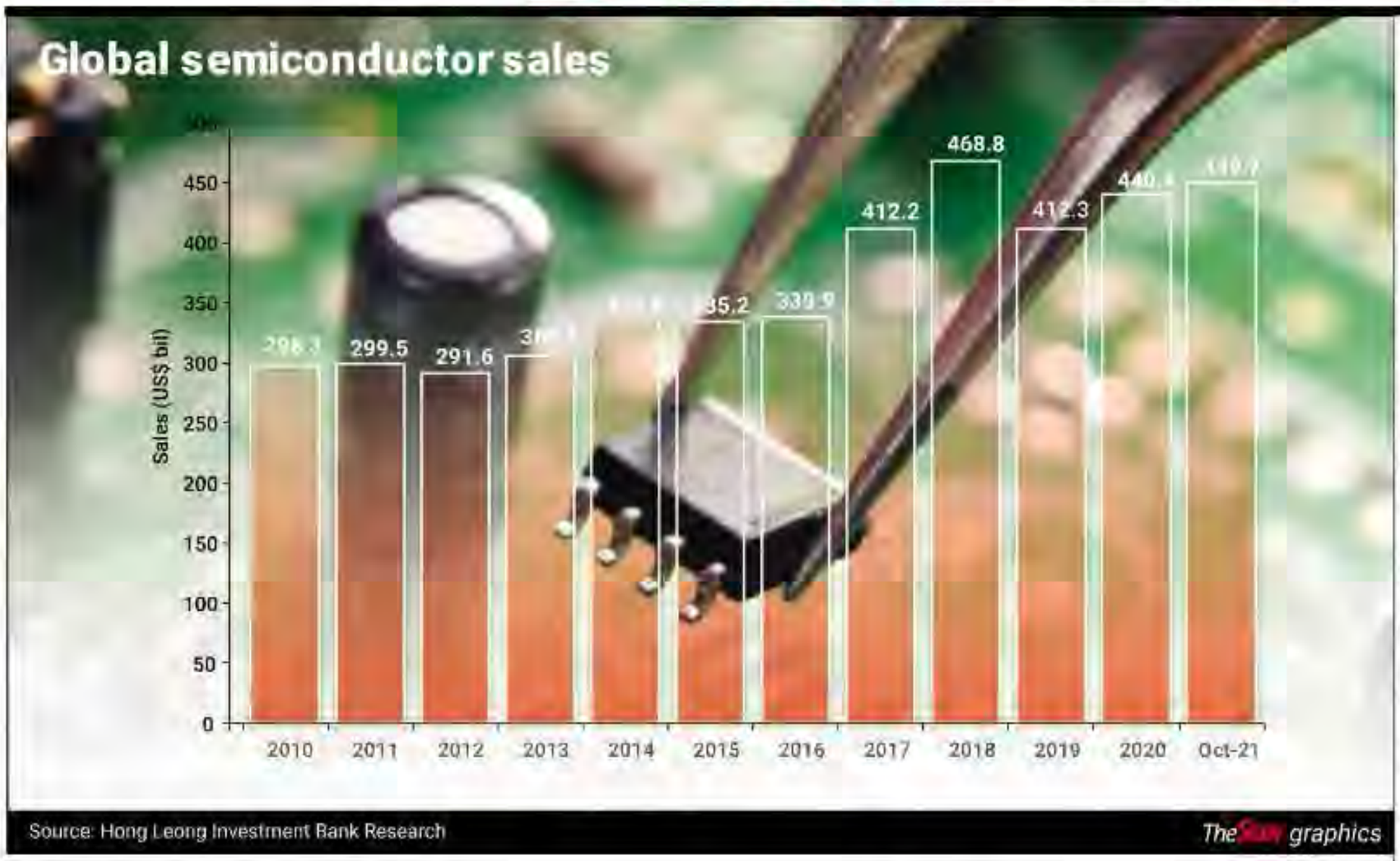

Source: Hong Leong Investment Bank Research

The Star graphics

Tech is talk of the town

Another bullish year in the offing

TECHNOLOGY

By GANESHWARAN KANA
ganeshwaran@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: The technology sector is set for another solid year in 2022.

Accelerated digitalisation and the upcycle of global semiconductor sales are pumping up demand, surpassing the industry players' ability to supply.

Hence, it is not surprising that companies are busy ramping up their production capacities to meet the supply shortage and future orders.

According to Hong Leong Investment Bank (HLIB) Research, the global technology sector's capital spending is expected to reach another record in 2022, on the back of a strong fabrication facility construction pipeline.

The research house, which maintained its "overweight" view, said the technology sector is expected to experience multi-year earnings growth, supported by fundamental exponential demand and further enticed by government incentives.

"We maintain our tactical position in favour of front-end players as many countries have rushed to develop their semiconductor capabilities, especially in leading edge (≤7nm) front-end fabrication (foundry) to be self-sufficient on the back of national strategic and security interests.

"However, on top of Frontken Corp Bhd and UWC Bhd who have exposures to front-end, we also include Kobay Technology Bhd as one of our top picks, leveraging on its rapidly growing new business ventures, namely advance data server and solar frame projects," it said in a note yesterday.

"As for 2022, the sector is expected to be on an expansionary mode with an 8% growth."

Hong Leong Investment Bank Research

The technology sector has been one of the few silver linings in the Malaysian stock market, amid its unexciting performance over the past two years.

In 2021, the Technology Index rose by 39%, outperforming the FBM KLCI which contracted by 4%.

The bullish investor sentiment on technology stocks was driven by the robust global semiconductor sales, which grew by 25% year-on-year (y-o-y) to US$450bil (RM1.89 trillion) in the first 10 months of 2021.

"The latest industry average growth projection of 23% exceeds our initial estimate of 20%.

"As for 2022, the sector is expected to be on an expansionary mode with an 8% growth," said HLIB Research.

It also pointed out that technology companies could be marginally boosted in 2022, on the back of a stronger US dollar.

This is because the majority of technology companies' sales are denominated in the greenback.

"HLIB Research expects the US dollar to be stronger in 2022 averaging RM4.16 per US dollar compared with 2020's average of RM4.14 per US dollar," it said.

On input costs, the research house pointed out that gold, aluminium, copper and steel prices are on the upward trajectories and this will exert pressures on the margins of packagers and equipment makers.

"However, we are not overly concerned as industry wide capacity constraint positions tech players with stronger bargaining power to pass through higher material costs," it said.

Looking ahead, HLIB Research anticipated the recovery in the smartphone and communication product segments to be the major growth driver, on the back of 5G proliferation.

"Next would be high-performance computing supported by the robust investments in cloud, crypto and metaverse.

"Although Internet-of-Things (IoT) devices generally have lower integrated circuit content, the sheer forecast volume suggests that this market is too big to ignore.

Watch the video
TheStarTV.com

> TURN TO PAGE 2

Evergrande unit seeks delaying possible yuan bond repayment

BEIJING: China Evergrande Group is seeking to delay an option for investors to demand early repayment on one of its yuan-denominated bonds, in the latest sign of distress amid a broader real estate debt crisis.

The property giant's onshore unit Hengda Real Estate will hold an online meeting from Jan 7 to 10 for holders of the note, it announced in a filing with the Shenzhen stock exchange.

The bond is its 4.5 billion yuan (US$706mil or RM2.97bil) 6.98% security due 2023, which has a Jan 8 put option.

The firm is proposing to postpone that option date as well as an interest payment also due that day to July 8.

The note will be suspended from trading from Jan 6.

Bondholders will review the company plan for the changes and the adjustment wouldn't trigger a default, according to the statement.

The development comes as China edges closer to potentially overhauling the world's most indebted developer that was started 25 years ago by Hui Ka Yan.

A lengthy battle over who gets paid from what remains.

Beijing has been reluctant to bail out Evergrande as it sends a clear signal that the Communist Party won't tolerate massive debt build-ups that threaten financial stability.

Evergrande was labelled a defaulter for the first time in early December as it missed making payments on dollar bonds.

A seven-member risk management committee was established at that time to "actively engage" with creditors.

That panel includes senior managers from Guangdong state-owned enterprises and China Cinda Asset Management Co, the nation's largest bad-debt manager.

Evergrande will likely not repay any bonds until an overall restructuring plan comes out, according to Ting Meng, a senior credit strategist at Australia & New Zealand Banking Group Ltd.

Onshore notes don't have grace periods so any failure to repay could trigger a default, and the move could help sidestep that for now if the company gets agreement from creditors, though eventual repayment would depend on how the restructuring shapes up, she said.

Evergrande's cash crunch has become a focus for global investors, concerned that a collapse might spark financial contagion and curb growth in the world's second-largest economy, which depends on the housing market for about a quarter of gross domestic product.

Its dollar bonds are trading at deep discounts to par value as investors brace for what could be one of China's largest-ever restructuring processes.

Evergrande, saddled with more than US$300bil (RM1.26 trillion) in total liabilities, is prioritising payments to migrant workers and suppliers as regulators urge the cash-strapped developer to head off any risk of social unrest.

It is also under pressure to finish homes for 1.6 million buyers who have already put down deposits, and must repay retail investors who bought some of its wealth products used to finance construction.

Meanwhile, China Huarong Asset Management Co's shares plunged in Hong Kong as it resumed trading following a US$6.6bil (RM27.68bil) bailout, the type of state-orchestrated rescue that appears unlikely for Evergrande. — Bloomberg

Tropicana poised to hit RM1.1bil sales target

More launches in the pipeline for this year

PROPERTY

KUALA LUMPUR: Tropicana Corp Bhd is on track to hit its sales target of RM1.1bil for 2021, backed by strategic offline and online marketing campaigns conducted throughout the year.

Staying true to its digital-focused strategy, the property developer said in a statement yesterday that it rolled out intensive digital marketing campaigns in 2021.

They included introducing virtual sales galleries and hosting many webinars, all of which helped the group to expand its customer engagement experience, reach a targeted millennial demographic and ultimately secure more sales.

"Prospective buyers can expect more exciting launches from Tropicana in 2022.

"From high-rise buildings to landed residences, as well as holiday homes and commercial properties, the launches will be happening in the company's existing townships in Selangor and Johor, as well as new hotspots in Genting Highlands and Langkawi."

In the same statement, Tropicana group chief executive officer Lee Han Ming said the company wrapped up the year by winning 10 more prestigious awards in December.

Lee dedicated the awards to the group's stakeholders and the Tropicana team for their contributions.

"We are proud to be associated with this distinction that is synonymous with our aspirations. Established in 1979, Tropicana actively seeks to redefine the art of living by building wholesome townships.

> ***"The group has planned over six townships and completed more than 60 developments across Malaysia."***
>
> Lee Han Ming

"The group has planned over six townships and completed more than 60 developments across Malaysia. We learn that now, more than ever, the importance of building a strong brand backed by a dedicated team," he said.

For the nine-month period ended Sept 30, 2021, Tropicana recorded revenue of RM606mil, which was mainly contributed by higher sales and progress billings across key projects in the Klang Valley and Southern Region.

During the period under review, Tropicana said its unbilled sales were up by 39% to RM1.2bil, backed by its unique residential, commercial and resort-themed developments.

"Overall, Tropicana's total land bank stood at 2,452 acres, with a total potential gross development value of RM152.2bil, placing the group in a good position to unlock the value of its strategic land bank and deliver sustainable earnings in the next few years," it said in an earlier statement.

While the industry remains challenging in the short term, there will still be demand for properties in prime locations in established, mature and developing townships with attractive pricing and innovative ownership packages and offerings, according to Tropicana.

"Therefore, the group will continue to focus on being market-driven in its product offerings whilst continuing to unlock the value of its land bank at strategic locations across the Klang Valley, Genting Highlands and southern regions.

"Tropicana will also continue to focus on the introduction of new phases across its signature and established developments, namely Tropicana Heights, Tropicana Aman, Tropicana Metropark, as well as Tropicana Uplands and Tropicana Alma in Johor."

Tengku Ahmad Badli to helm Agrobank

KUALA LUMPUR: Agrobank has appointed Tengku Ahmad Badli Shah Raja Hussin (*pic*) as its new president and chief executive officer effective Jan 3, 2022.

In a statement, the bank said Tengku Ahmad Badli has more than 29 years of extensive experience in banking and finance as well as a proven track record in the industry.

"Prior to joining Agrobank, he has held various leadership roles in several large financial institutions in Malaysia namely Pelaburan Mara Bhd, Kuwait Finance House and HSBC Bank Malaysia Bhd," it added.

Agrobank chairman Datuk Mustapha Buang said Tengku Ahmad Badli's broad experience in strategic planning, business development, legal and syariah-compliant financing coupled with his strong leadership skills and vision would further strengthen the bank's position as the leading agriculture financial institution in Malaysia.

"The appointment of Tengku Ahmad Badli demonstrates our strong dedication to ensure the success of our 2021-2025 strategic business plan. The board is confident that he is well-positioned to drive and lead the next exhilarating phase of Agrobank with the aim to assist the unserved and underserved community and transform the agrifinance landscape beyond banking," he added.

On the appointment, Tengku Ahmad Badli said Agrobank, which is an important development financial institution for shaping the future of the agriculture sector, has shown great performance in fulfilling its mandated role especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"I am looking forward to building the success of Agrobank together with the team by creating a positive impact in ensuring the community well-being, sustainable environment and economic growth without compromising on our shareholders' returns," he said.

MISC unit takes delivery of shuttle tanker

KUALA LUMPUR: AET, a wholly-owned subsidiary of MISC Bhd, has taken delivery of a Suezmax Dynamic Positioning (DP2) shuttle tanker that has been purpose-built for long-term charter to oil and gas giant Shell.

In a statement yesterday, AET said the shuttle tanker, Eagle Campos, will be the first of three purpose-built vessels that would be chartered to Brazil Shipping I Ltd, a subsidiary of Shell.

"AET's commitment to moving energy in an increasingly responsible and eco-friendly way led to the agreement with Shell in December 2019 to operate the three Suezmax DP2 shuttle tankers in the international and Brazilian basin on a long-term charter, with Eagle Campos being the first in this series.

"She was delivered to AET on Jan 5, 2022 and will commence operations in Brazil, joining Eagle Pilar which AET already operates there for Shell."

Shuttle tankers are used for the offloading and transporting oil from offshore oil installations.

AET said Eagle Campos' two sister vessels are under construction at the Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI) in Ulsan, South Korea and due to be delivered later this year.

"AET and Eaglestar site teams have been working closely together with the HHI team to ensure that all health and safety precautions were in place, to safeguard the construction and delivery of the vessels during the pandemic."

In the same statement, AET dynamic positioning shuttle tankers (DPST) global director Amit Pal said the delivery of Eagle Campos is another milestone in the company's growing partnership with Shell, globally.

"Constructing, fulfilling the stringent tests and delivering Eagle Campos safely during an ongoing pandemic is a huge achievement and evidence to the persevered dedication of all parties involved.

"This accomplishment showcases the unity across the industry to deliver innovative solutions which contribute to a brighter future and create a sustainable global trade network."

Amit added that the vessel delivery had fortified AET's position as a leading owner and operator of 12 of highly specialised DP shuttle tankers globally, with eight vessels (including Eagle Campos) currently operating in the Brazilian basin.

"Witnessing the fruition of our agreement with Shell signifies the commitment from both parties to high-quality, safe and responsible operations," he said.

Meanwhile, AET said the DP2 vessel, which has a deadweight tonnage of 153,000, has been built to Shell's technical requirements for DP2 shuttle tankers in Brazil and will operate to the highest operational and environmental standards.

Eagle Campos is equipped with electrical-driven variable frequency drive cargo pumps and high-power thrusters for enhanced fuel efficiency and is fully capable of operating in weather conditions expected for their class.

"The eco-efficient vessel is also fitted with energy-saving devices such as the hi pre-swirl duct and rudder bulb for improved propulsion efficiency and is already energy efficiency ship index phase two-compliant before the regulations come into effect," the company said.

Chip demand from auto sector likely to be strong

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"Lastly, demand from automotive is expected to be solid as electric or autonomous vehicles require significantly higher semiconductor content," it said.

Meanwhile, TA Securities Research remained bullish on the semiconductor sector with an "overweight" view.

It highlighted its preference for outsourced assembly and test providers for their strong sales pipeline and earnings growth prospects, anchored by their expansion plans and robust balance sheet.

Among such companies are Inari Amertron Bhd, Malaysian Pacific Industries Bhd and Unisem (M) Bhd.

"We expect them to continue benefitting from the global structural growth in chip demand alongside the ongoing acceleration in digitalisation and proliferation of secular technology trends like 5G, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, IoT, robotics, and vehicle electrification.

"Key downside risks include a prolonged Covid-19 pandemic weighing on economic growth and disrupting supply chains, a heightened trade war, weaker-than-expected sales and a weakening of the US dollar against the ringgit," according to the research house.

Quoting data from the World Semiconductor Trade Statistics (WSTS), TA Securities Research said global chip sales hit a new record in November 2021.

In the month, global chip sales grew 1.5% month-on-month and 23.5% y-o-y to US$49.7bil (RM208.42bil).

"With this, the industry has now chalked up 22 consecutive months of year-on-year growth, and with that in the recent eight months hovering above 20% y-o-y," it pointed out.

TA Securities Research added that the industry's rosy backdrop reflected the robust demand for chips amid the Covid-19 sparked accelerated digitalisation and proliferation of secular technology trends.

At the current run rate, the semiconductor industry is on track to meet the WSTS' projection for global semiconductor sales in 2021 to reach a new annual high of US$553bil (RM2.32 trillion), up by 25.1% y-o-y.

"As for 2022, WSTS projects sales growing further to US$601.5bil (RM2.52 trillion) (which is up 8.8% y-o-y)," the research house said.

AM Best: More transparency seen

KUALA LUMPUR: Global credit rating agency AM Best expects the revised quantitative and qualitative requirements under the China Risk-Oriented Solvency System (C-ROSS) phase two, to have a significant impact on the various insurance market segments.

The recent revision to China's solvency regime should allow for greater transparency in risks and capital quality, it said.

Most insurance companies are likely to observe various degrees of decline immediately in solvency ratios depending on their product mix, capital structure, and aggressiveness in their investment strategies.

Under the updated solvency regime, capital recognition has been tightened and the industry is expected to see a drop in admitted capital in solvency calculations.

Insurers will face higher capital requirements arising from long-term equity investments, particularly in non-insurance subsidiaries that give the insurer controllership, which will be 100% risk charged. — Bernama

PROPERTY

LBS Bina aims for RM1.6bil sales in 2022

Developer cautiously optimistic of a better year ahead

By THOMAS HUONG
huong@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: LBS Bina Group Bhd is aiming for RM1.6bil sales this year, on the back of the property developer's plan to launch 14 new projects with a gross development value (GDV) totalling RM1.77bil.

These projects, consisting of 3,733 units, will be located in the Klang Valley, Johor, Pahang and Perak.

Executive chairman Tan Sri Lim Hock San pointed out that in 2021, the group surpassed its RM1.2bil sales target, ending the year with RM1.57bil in property sales.

"LBS recorded a steady performance in 2021 despite a tough year for businesses.

"Not only did we manage to surpass our 2021 property sales target by 31%, we also successfully handed over vacant possession of 2,570 units worth RM1.3bil.

"It is indeed worthwhile being able to provide affordable homes to the community and seeing them happy when they received the keys to their new homes," he said at a media briefing.

Lim added that he is cautiously optimistic the property market will make a comeback this year, provided there is no major Covid-19 outbreak which will result in lockdowns.

In 2021, LBS Bina launched 3,344 residential units worth RM1.6bil at its KITA @ Cybersouth, LBS Alam Perdana, Bukit Jalil and Prestige Residence in Seri Kembangan within the Klang Valley.

Other launches last year included terrace houses in Bandar Putera Indah township, Batu Pahat, and new phases at Taman Kinding Flora, Chemor.

Lim also opined that housing prices may increase due to the rise in the cost of building materials.

"Property prices will go up because building material prices have gone up. But we cannot simply increase prices as we need to make sure people can still afford to buy," he said.

Lim pointed out that the group has partnered the Selangor state government on the Rumah Selangorku Idaman MBI project to deliver 7,210 affordable homes with a GDV of RM2.01bil at six locations.

LBS Bina targets to launch four Rumah Selangorku Idaman MBI in 2022 – Idaman BSP (Bandar Saujana Putra), Idaman Cahaya (Shah Alam), Idaman Sari (Puchong) and Idaman Melur (Cybersouth).

Meanwhile, Idaman KITA (Cybersouth) and Idaman Perdana (Bandar Puncak Alam) are due for launch in 2023.

In the Klang Valley, which contributed the highest sales to the group in 2021, LBS Bina plans to launch 2,604 residential units with a GDV of RM1.11bil this year.

Lim pointed out that as at Dec 31, 2021, the group's land bank stood at 2,744 acres, which would keep it busy for the next 10 to 15 years.

"LBS Bina has 18 ongoing development projects with an estimated GDV of RM5.3bil.

"In addition, the group has unbilled sales of RM2.3bil, which is expected to provide clear earnings visibility over the next two to three years," he said.

He added that the group will continue to maintain its dividend policy to pay out at least 30% of its profit after tax.

Lim noted that despite a challenging 2021, the group had recorded strong property sales with the aid of digital marketing initiatives and the use of Industrialised Building System precast technology.

To kickstart 2022, LBS Bina has launched the "Bring Happiness Home" campaign, which rewards home buyers with a total of RM438,888 Chinese New Year *angpows*.

Under this campaign, which runs from Jan 1 to Feb 28, 2022, LBS Bina offers furnishing packages, low booking fees, loyalty rewards, flexi payment schemes and zero-exit fees.

The group is also waiving legal fees and stamp duty on loan agreements for all home buyers when they buy from a selection of LBS Bina's residential properties.

Latest offering: Lim (centre) and LBS Bina's management team at a ceremony to launch the group's 'Bring Happiness Home' campaign. The campaign offers furnishing packages, low booking fees, loyalty rewards, flexi payment schemes and zero-exit fees.

Car sales likely to rebound on SST exemption

PETALING JAYA: The automotive industry is expected to see a rebound in total industry volume (TIV) this year, say analysts.

The main reason is the sales and service tax (SST) exemption for vehicle purchases that is still in place, they said.

According to Hong Leong Investment Bank (HLIB) Research, TIV is expected to grow by 18.8% year-on-year (y-o-y) to 600,000 units in 2022.

This would be driven by the extension of the SST exemption until the middle of this year, the backlog of pent-up orders from 2021, new model launches in 2021 and early 2022, as well as the low base effect from last year.

However, sales in the first half of the year are expected to be much stronger than the second half, it said.

"The outlook in 2022 can be broadly categorised into two halves: a strong first half (average 60,000 to 65,000 units per month), driven by the SST exemption.

"This will be followed by a weak second half (averaging 35,000 to ~40,000 units per month) due to the after-effects of the SST exemption ending, as car buyers would have brought forward their purchases," HLIB Research said.

The research house said that this effect of bringing forward purchases was seen during the 2018 "tax holiday" from June to September when the goods and services tax was "zero-rised" but SST had yet to be re-implemented.

"Any model introduced in 2022 may soften the negative impact of post-SST exemption," HLIB Research said.

The research house said it expects a challenging second half of the year, with stiff competition to emerge across the board.

"Original equipment manufacturers will have to leverage on attractive new models and sales programmes in order to sustain sales," it said.

Meanwhile, RHB Research said the full-year TIV figure for 2021 is likely to beat its forecast of 470,000 units, which implies a 13% y-o-y decline.

"Despite the robust 2021 performance, we leave our 2022 forecast TIV of 540,000 units unchanged as we expect much of the backlog to be filled this year.

"This is given the persistent chip shortage and earlier-than-expected extension of the SST exemption period," it said.

RHB Research is also expecting a post-SST exemption hangover eventually in the second half of the year.

"The SST exemption should compensate for the loss of sales during the full lockdown and keep demand buoyed, coupled with the low interest-rate environment amidst production bottlenecks.

"Our view remains largely unchanged and we think the extension in SST exemption to June 2022 will not be as effective as before," it said.

It reasoned that consumers intending to take advantage of the SST discounts would have already done so during the past 18 months.

"Beyond that, we expect TIV to taper off for a few quarters following the re-imposition of the SST, before resuming growth," it said.

RHB Research is keeping its "neutral" call on the auto sector at this juncture, as it said near-term headwinds such as component shortage and the Covid-19 workplace threat are expected to remain.

HLIB Research also maintained its "neutral" call on the sector as it also noted that TIV is expected to normalise in the second half.

Rubber market closes higher

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian rubber market closes higher, lifted by the strong performance of the regional futures market and a weaker ringgit against the US dollar, a dealer says.

He said market sentiment yesterday was also boosted by optimism from China's central bank measures and strong global manufacturing data.

"Further gains were capped by lingering worries about the rapid rise of Omicron cases worldwide," he said.

The Japanese rubber futures rose yesterday, supported by a weaker yen against the US dollar and a rally in the Shanghai market, although lingering concerns over rising Covid-19 cases kept investors cautious.

The Malaysian Rubber Board's (MRB) price for Standard Malaysian Rubber (SMR) 20 increased 14 sen to 735.50 sen a kg yesterday while latex-in-bulk rose 7.5 sen to 552 sen per kg. At 5pm, MRB's closing price for SMR 20 stood at 727 sen a kg while latex-in-bulk was at 556.5 sen a kg. — Bernama

HSBC Malaysia implements hybrid work model

KUALA LUMPUR: HSBC Malaysia has implemented a hybrid work model to "improve employees' well-being and empower flexibility" as part of its commitment to the future of the work model.

The bank said said the hybrid work model would improve employee well-being and increase productivity as it moves to its new headquarters in Menara IQ at the Tun Razak Exchange (TRX).

"The new flexible working style will also see improved productivity as engagement between teams and customers become more purposeful," it said in a statement.

HSBC has invested about RM1bil into Menara IQ at TRX as part of its commitment to enhance focus on work flexibility, providing a fit-for-purpose modern working environment and integrating the highest standards of environmental sustainability.

The hybrid work model is part of a global initiative to improve well-being, provide more flexibility and reduce the global office footprint by more than 3.6 million sq ft or around 20% by end-2021.

HSBC Malaysia country head of human resources Sugunah Verumandy said the bank is continuously proactively shaping the way its employees work.

"Hybrid working is not only about where we work, it is about how and when we work.

"We're creating a culture that enables us to be at our best and deliver exceptional outcomes for our customers – a culture that promotes flexibility, collaboration, learning and well-being in both the physical and virtual workplace," she added.

That said, HSBC Malaysia said it has provided its eligible employees with a one-time cash reimbursement for the purchase of office equipment, ensuring they have the necessary IT and security infrastructure to support large-scale work-from-home arrangements.

"Focus groups are also ongoing so that HSBC can continue to address the needs of its people and make hybrid and flexible work more sustainable," it added.

HSBC Malaysia has also implemented various initiatives in support of mental and physical health, well-being leave and development day.

For mental health, the bank said employees have access to a global support service known as the Employee Assistance Programme.

"It is a free, independent and professional counselling service for HSBC employees and their dependents to get help on a wide range of issues," it added.

The Made in China plan is back, and it's better

By ANJANI TRIVEDI

AS the world headed into 2022 grappling with the latest virus variant, China unveiled a sharpened version of the Made in China 2025 industrial policy blueprint. Previous iterations may have had nations like the United States on edge, but this is the one to keep an eye on.

State planners released a five-year smart manufacturing development plan in late December that aims to digitise 70% of the country's large enterprises.

China will now focus on building and owning industrial robots, as well as upgrading equipment and processes used in the manufacturing sector.

These may not have the same buzz as nanotechnology, new materials or human job-stealing robots – sectors targeted in the last Made in China plan.

However, the latest blueprint has the potential to help Beijing become the factory floor of the future, with uber-efficient and precise machinery, at a time when the United States' biggest hurdle to competitiveness is just that.

With global supply chains in a state of disarray, China's intent to upgrade its vast industrial production sector and the ecosystem around it to bolster its role as the world's supplier is shrewd and prescient: Beijing will do better what it already does well.

Core to the latest intelligent manufacturing plan is growing the country's industrial robotics sector revenue at an annual rate of 20% over the next three years and doubling the density of robots – a proxy for automation adoption.

These aren't just in factories, but also in warehouses, logistical functions and other related areas that make the entire sector operate in a way that raises productivity, including better and more electric cars, batteries and electronics.

In addition, Beijing intends to create small and medium companies that are focused on very specific sectors – what it calls "little giants" – that are globally competitive and essential to industrial technology. In doing so, it also wants to reduce dependence on foreign companies.

New blueprint: A technician installing an artificial hand onto an industrial robot. China will now focus on building and owning industrial robots, as well as upgrading equipment and processes used in the manufacturing sector. — Bloomberg

China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology called for improvements in areas like high-precision speed reducers, servo systems, robot controllers and integrated intelligent joints, according to analysts from Daiwa Capital Markets Hong Kong Ltd.

These are all key components used in equipment for industrial automation that help with motion control and other machine functions.

While these targets seem ambitious, they are in line with a global trend toward automated factories: In 2021, there were 126 robots per 10,000 employees across the world, up from 66 five years ago.

China is by far the largest market – it has 44% of robot installations and ranks ninth in terms of density globally, up from 25th place just five years ago, according to the International Federation of Robots.

Meanwhile, the United States, with an 8% share, comes in seventh.

Still, just because there's a plan doesn't mean it's a sure-shot.

Companies like Estun Automation Co, China's largest industrial robot manufacturer, have grown through acquisition of foreign companies rather than with leaps in technology. Those businesses have then been expanded to create supply chains around them.

Government subsidies, too, loom large in the company's earnings. Officials recently said they will encourage merger and acquisition activity in the sector.

It would be remiss to say this is just another attempt by Chinese policy makers to move toward technological innovation, or to develop a blueprint like several other Soviet-style plans the nation has churned out since the 1950s.

Instead, Beijing has acknowledged that to stay ahead and maintain its leading role as a global manufacturing hub, it'll need to upgrade.

A ministry official recently said that "there are still gaps and a weak industrial foundation, and the quality, stability and reliability of key components cannot meet the needs of high-performance complete machines," state media reported.

The United States and other nations have been talking up advanced manufacturing, too. Yet limited progress has been made.

The global supply chain snarls that have left companies across the world scrambling to produce goods with all the right parts in a timely fashion makes that clear. It's also put a spotlight on the otherwise mundane role of factories and their workers, shipping, logistics and warehouses, exposing deficiencies in the US industrial complex. — Bloomberg

Anjani Trivedi is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering industrial companies in Asia. The views expressed here are the writer's own.

Is Apple worth US$3 trillion? Bulls, bears examine the case

By STEPHEN NELLIS

IS Apple Inc really worth US$3 trillion (RM12.58 trillion) 16 months after becoming the first company valued at US$2 trillion (RM8.39 trillion)?

The answer depends on how one views the iPhone maker's ability to keep up the unprecedented growth of the past 15 years.

In its last fiscal year ended Sept 25, Apple delivered 33% revenue growth to US$365.8bil (RM1.53 trillion) thanks to strong demand for 5G iPhone upgrades.

But that growth spurt came after a year of single-digit sales growth and a fiscal 2019 when Apple's sales declined.

The bull case for Apple is that it has built an ecosystem of one billion iPhone owners who spend money on services and that it is well-positioned for future categories like self-driving cars and augmented reality.

The deep discount investors once ascribed to Apple's stock because of its dependence on the iPhone for sales growth has disappeared as Apple has proved that the device sits at the centre of an expanding solar system that adds new gadgets like the Apple Watch and Apple AirTags and new, paid services like television and fitness classes.

Another concern is uncertainty over Apple's ability to lock in the same profits for paid services on its future hardware.

"Apple has been and still is an incredible growth story anchored by must-have products and a growing portfolio of services.

"While years ago the stock price was a value investor's dream, I don't think the current near-record high price should be a sell signal for long-term focused investors," said Trip Miller, managing partner at Gullane Capital Partners.

Moreover, Apple is trading at about 30 times its expected 12-month earnings, down a bit from a multiple of 32 in early 2021 but still at highs not seen since 2008, according to Refinitiv data.

Hal Eddins, chief economist at Apple shareholder Capital Investment Counsel, said Apple has been a "safety stock" through the pandemic and that investors are likely expecting solid holiday sales.

Apple "seems to be vaccinated against anything that Omicron can throw at it," Eddins said.

"I'm not complacent at this level, but there would have to be some nasty unforeseen events to rock the boat."

Some analysts believe Apple has plenty of room to grow in coming years, with future products such as the Apple Car.

"We see the prospects of Apple Car – representing the clearest path to doubling Apple's revenue and market cap – catalysing a shift in investor narrative back toward the attractiveness of the platform (one billion loyal customers) and long-term, sustainable growth," Morgan Stanley analyst Katy L. Huberty wrote in a November note.

The bear case, however, is that Apple is hitting the limits of how much it can grow its user base and how much cash it can squeeze from each user, with no guarantees that future product categories will prove as lucrative as the iPhone.

In a December note to investors, Bernstein analyst Toni Sacconaghi warned that Apple's prospects in the augmented and virtual reality category are bright but likely to account for only 4% of its revenue by 2030.

Moreover, the entire market for those devices is not likely to near the billion-unit mark until 2040, he wrote.

No obvious catalysts

Sacconaghi also saw "no obvious catalysts for multiple expansion" in Apple's stock "given slower expected growth" in the next fiscal year.

He has a market-perform rating on the stock.

Another concern is uncertainty over Apple's ability to lock in the same profits for paid services on its future hardware.

Its App Store business model, which takes commissions on in-app purchases of digital goods, has been targeted by proposed legislation in the United States and Europe.

To be sure, one of the primary drivers of Apple's ballooning valuation is the goal it set in 2018 to get what at the time was nearly US$100bil (RM419.33bil) in net cash off its balance sheet and become net-cash neutral.

That goal, for which Apple never specified a deadline, has been tough to meet because it simply keeps making money.

Apple generated US$104bil (RM436.10bil) in cash from operations in fiscal 2021 and returned US$106.5bil (RM446.59bil) to shareholders.

But its net cash remained at US$66bil (RM276.76bil) at the fiscal year's end.

With big acquisitions largely out of the question under current US antitrust regulators, Apple has had few options but to shovel cash back to shareholders, said Tom Plumb, founder of Wisconsin Capital Management and an Apple shareholder.

"They're fighting the fact they've got US$100bil (RM419.33bil) of cash flow a year," Plumb said. "You can't bet against a company that has this type of cash flow." — Reuters

Stephen Nellis writes for Reuters. The views expressed here are the writer's own.

Full B20 biodiesel mandate by year-end

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia plans to implement its nationwide adoption of the B20 palm oil biofuel programme by the end of 2022, the country's palm oil board said yesterday.

The mandate to manufacture biofuel with a 20% palm oil component – known as B20 – for the transport sector was first rolled out in January 2020 but faced delays due to movement curbs imposed to contain the coronavirus outbreaks.

"We will do it stage-by-stage basis depending on the government's financial capabilities," Ravi Muthayah, the commodities ministry's secretary-general said during a seminar here. — Reuters

EXCHANGE RATE

OPENING RATES BY MAYBANK ON JAN 5, 2022

	SELLING TT/OD	BUYING TT	BUYING OD
1 US Dollar	4.2490	4.1240	4.1140
1 Australian Dollar	3.0940	2.9720	2.9560
1 Brunei Dollar	3.1330	3.0430	3.0350
1 Canadian Dollar	3.3410	3.2530	3.2410
1 Euro	4.8010	4.6470	4.6270
1 New Zealand Dollar	2.9100	2.8020	2.7850
1 Singapore Dollar	3.1330	3.0430	3.0350
1 Sterling Pound	5.7570	5.5770	5.5570
1 Swiss Franc	4.6230	4.5170	4.5020
100 UAE Dirham	117.0500	111.0000	110.8000
100 Bangladesh Taka	5.0410	4.7270	4.5270
100 Danish Krone	66.1700	60.8900	60.6900
100 Hongkong Dollar	55.1100	52.3700	52.1700
100 Indian Rupee	5.8000	5.4400	5.2400
100 Indonesian Rupiah	0.0307	0.0278	0.0228
100 Japanese Yen	3.6620	3.5470	3.5370
100 Norwegian Krone	49.2200	45.2800	45.0800
100 Pakistan Rupee	2.4500	2.2900	2.0900
100 Philippine Peso	8.4300	7.9500	7.7500
100 Qatar Riyal	118.0100	112.0300	111.8300
100 Saudi Riyal	114.4200	108.6200	108.4200
100 South Africa Rand	27.4800	24.8100	24.6100
100 Sri Lanka Rupee	2.1500	1.9800	1.7800
100 Swedish Krona	48.2000	43.8700	43.6700
100 Thai Baht	13.3500	11.8500	11.4500

CPO prices to stay high in first quarter

Supply expected to remain tight

COMMODITIES

"Malaysia is also currently experiencing heavier-than-usual rainfall in some of the palm oil regions while the current labour shortage issue remains unresolved."

CGS-CIMB Research

PETALING JAYA: Tight supply is expected to sustain crude palm oil (CPO) prices at current elevated levels in the early part of this year.

It is noted that the present heavier-than-usual rainfall in some of the palm oil regions and unresolved labour shortage at various plantations will continue to weigh on production.

In addition, the first quarter is historically a low-production season for palm oil.

Based on these circumstances, CGS-CIMB Research has projected that spot CPO prices would range between RM4,500 and RM5,500 per tonne this month.

"Palm oil supplies are likely to stay tight in the near term, given that the first quarter is typically the low-production season for palm oil.

"Malaysia is also currently experiencing heavier-than-usual rainfall in some of the palm oil regions while the current labour shortage issue remains unresolved," it said.

As supply eases towards the latter part of the year, CGS-CIMB said CPO prices would likely average at RM3,600 per tonne in 2022, before moderating further to an average of RM3,240 per tonne next year.

Overall, it maintains a "neutral" call on the sector, citing concerns over environment, social and governance (ESG) issues.

It said ESG concerns would partly offset the impact of strong earnings and the prevailing undemanding valuations of the sector versus historical averages.

In 2021, CPO prices rose 64% year-on-year (y-o-y) to average at a new record high of RM4,407 per tonne amid tight supply of edible oils.

CGS-CIMB noted that the 2021 average CPO price came in 3% higher than its projection of RM4,270 per tonne due to weaker-than-expected supply.

In December alone, the average CPO price rose 40% y-o-y to RM5,070 per tonne.

CGS-CIMB said findings from a survey of palm oil areas by its futures team revealed that Malaysia's CPO output probably fell 8.1% month-on-month (m-o-m), but grew 12.7% y-o-y to 1.5 million tonnes last month.

Palm oil exports, on the other hand, likely fell 5.7% m-o-m and 14.9% y-o-y to 1.38 million tonnes based on export statistics by cargo surveyors Intertek Testing Services, SGS and Amspec Malaysia.

It also estimated that Malaysia's palm oil inventory fell 3.6% m-o-m, but grew 38.5% y-o-y to 1.75 million tonnes at end-December 2021.

The industry's official figures are scheduled to be released on Monday.

CGS-CIMB said the estimated CPO output by Malaysia at 1.5 million tonnes last month came in slightly lower when compared against the 10-year average of 1.51 million tonnes for the month of December.

"The lower estimated achievement for December 2021 output against historical production for the same month could be due to flooding in some estates due to heavier-than-usual rainfall in the last two weeks of the month and the labour shortage situation," it explained.

The decline in December palm oil exports, it said, was likely due to lower exports to India and China.

The estimated palm oil export volume for last month was also lower than the historical 10-year average of 1.48 million tonnes for December, CGS-CIMB said.

It said this could be due to demand rationing by price-sensitive consumers and tight supplies.

Maybank unit to launch China equity fund

KUALA LUMPUR: Maybank Asset Management Group Bhd's (MAMG) subsidiary, Maybank Asset Management Sdn Bhd, has launched the first-of-its-kind China Equity Fund, which focuses beyond the 100 largest Chinese stocks.

Maybank Asset Management had partnered with global investment firm T. Rowe Price to offer T. Rowe Price's premier China-focused equity strategy to Malaysian investors via the MAMG China Evolution Equity Fund, the group said.

In a statement yesterday, MAMG chief executive officer Ahmad Najib Nazlan said the group is presenting yet another innovative product for Malaysian investors to kick off the new year, with MAMG China Evolution Equity Fund.

"We are the first asset management company in Malaysia to offer this first-of-its-kind fund where we seek to uncover the hidden gems of China's economic transformation.

"By extending our reach beyond the top 100 stocks into a universe of over 5,500 untapped stocks, this unique pivot provides us with an unconstrained all-China investment approach to pick the best and most valuable upcoming companies, coupled with our environmental, social, and governance fundamentals to ensure business sustainability," he said.

The fund will leverage T. Rowe Price's dedicated China equity investment strategy and focus on the under-explored 98% of the opportunity set to identify the future winners on the right side of China's new phase of economic growth which focuses on quality and innovation.

This strategy is managed by Wenli Zheng, Hong Kong-based portfolio manager who has over 13 years of investment experience at the global asset manager, it said.

Meanwhile, Elsie Chan, head of distribution for Asia ex-Japan at T. Rowe Price, said China is a deep market with over 5,500 onshore and offshore-listed companies, offering a huge opportunity set to investors.

"It remains a fertile hunting ground for investors seeking sustainable businesses and potential excess return opportunity through bottom-up fundamental research.

"We are pleased to partner with Maybank Asset Management to offer this unique investment strategy for investors in Malaysia to complement their investment portfolios and pursue the attractive but overlooked opportunities amid China's economy upgrade," she added. — Bernama

Kiplepay, NCIA in cashless card tie-up for Orang Asli

KUALA LUMPUR: The Northern Corridor Implementation Authority (NCIA) has teamed up with Kiplepay Sdn Bhd to provide prepaid cashless cards for Orang Asli communities in Perak.

The programme will be carried out through its financial aid initiative "Kasih Ibu Darul Ridzuan" (KIDR).

NCIA said the cashless cards, which would be reloaded with RM250 monthly provided by the federal government, can be used to purchase basic necessities from local merchants, inclusive of Orang Asli merchants.

"These merchants include 15 *kedai bergerak* (mobile merchants), who exist specifically to address location accessibility issues," it said in a statement.

NCIA chief executive Datuk Seri Jebasingam Issace John said the programme is in line with the government's aim to move the entire nation forward.

"Mobile merchants provide a service that brings them and their products to their purchasers, rather than the other way around.

"This solves a key problem that many Orang Asli communities face, particularly those whose villages are in secluded areas that can be accessed only by four-by-four vehicles and boats.

"By enabling mobile merchants to adopt this feature with Kiplepay's cashless cards, NCIA hopes that even those in rural areas will be inspired to upskill their digital literacy and embrace digital change," Jebasingam added.

Kiplepay Sdn Bhd acting chief executive officer Ricky Lew said the move would encourage communities in rural areas to embrace digital solutions in their lives and in turn bring them more opportunities in the future.

"With the cashless cards and payment terminals powered by Kiplepay, Orang Asli recipients and merchants will be exposed and have access to safer, contactless payment transactions," he added.

Kulop bin Pandak, a retailer at Kampung Orang Asli Tumbuh Hangat in Bota, said the programme helps increase the sales of his business and ease the burden of high cost of living for the recipients.

He hoped the KIDR initative would continue and be expanded to more eligible recipients.

The programme has benefitted 4,701 recipients including 1,094 Orang Asli communities in 2021.

To date, it has onboarded 150 merchants, of which 25 are from the Orang Asli communities.

IHH to file motion to dismiss RM27.26bil Emqore suit

KUALA LUMPUR: IHH Healthcare Bhd intends to file a motion to dismiss the amended complaint by Emqore Envesecure Private Capital Trust for the suit involving damages in excess of US$6.5bil (RM27.26bil).

IHH said it has strong grounds for seeking dismissal of Emqore Envesecure's claims on three principal grounds – lack of personal jurisdiction, forum non-conveniens and failure to state a claim for relief.

"IHH intends to defend vigorously against the claims," it said in a filing with Bursa Malaysia yesterday.

IHH said it is not possible to determine the estimated potential liability to the company arising from the suit as the suit involves 28 named defendants and 20 non-party defendants.

"However, as at the date of this announcement, the suit is not expected to have any business, operational or financial impact on IHH as the company believes that it has strong grounds for dismissal of the suit," it said.

On June 16, 2020, Emqore Envesecure filed a suit against IHH on allegations relating to the issuance of the shares of Fortis Healthcare Ltd to IHH's subsidiary around 2018.

Emqore Envesecure broadly alleges that it has purportedly suffered losses as the defendants had allegedly conspired to frustrate a proposed share acquisition transaction between Fortis Healthcare and Emqore Envesecure's supposed predecessors. — Bernama

Tariff interruption raises regulatory concerns

TNB's cash flow to remain neutral despite delay

UTILITIES

PETALING JAYA: While the delay in the periodic electricity tariff review will likely have a neutral impact on Tenaga Nasional Bhd's (TNB) cash flow, the extension of the current electricity tariff schedule poses a regulatory risk to TNB.

Late last week, the Energy Commission and TNB said the periodic electricity tariff review, comprising both the Regulatory Period 3 (RP3) implementation and half-yearly imbalance cost pass-through (ICPT) review, has been delayed until further notice.

The current RP2-extension parameters will be extended further during this period, with base tariff maintained at 39.45sen per kilowatt hour (kwh) while the previous ICPT rebate of 2sen/kwh is also maintained.

The decision comes on the heels of the natural disaster faced by the country currently, coupled with a significant increase in global fuel prices, particularly since mid-2021, as well as a still fragile macro recovery.

Notably, a potential rise in rates will not augur well for the country.

MIDF Research, in a report yesterday, said the decision to delay the tariff review came as a surprise, considering this is the second such delay. It must be noted that RP2, which expired in 2020, had been extended for one year until end-2021.

The research house also noted that TNB's deep ICPT under-recovery position of RM1.3bil as at the third quarter of financial year 2021 is a result of rising coal and gas market prices.

"While our checks suggests that TNB's cash flow will remain neutral to the decision to maintain the ICPT rebate (suggesting TNB will remain compensated for the generation fuel cost under-recovery), the interruption in the tariff-setting process raises regulatory concerns, particularly amid still elevated global fuel prices.

"Additionally, this means uncertainties on the determination of RP3 regulated returns will prolong and remains an overhang in the immediate future," it said.

Given that the latest development may cap upside for the stock in the near-term – coupled with lingering environmental, social and governance concerns – MIDF has downgraded the stock to "neutral" from "buy" previously.

It also lowered its target price to RM9.55 a share from RM11.80 previously. This is to incorporate the higher risk premium into its discounted cashflow valuation to reflect the emerging regulatory concern.

"We think prospects of a valuation re-rating for TNB could be pushed out further."

Nevertheless, upside risk to its call could emerge from more aggressive than expected build-up of renewable energy (RE) assets against TNB's 8,300 megawatts RE capacity target by 2025.

An earlier than expected spin-off of its generation unit, which has been a drag to overall group valuation given its coal generation exposure, could also be a re-rating catalyst.

TNB's closed 5 sen lower at RM9.13 yesterday.

BAT's plans may be affected by postponement

PETALING JAYA: The postponement of the excise duty on electronic cigarette's and vaporiser product's nicotine-laced liquid and gel could put British American Tobacco Bhd's (BAT) plans to move into the segment in limbo.

On Jan 3, the Royal Malaysian Customs Department (RMCD) announced that it would postpone the levy, which was supposed to begin on Jan 1, 2022, to a later date.

No reason was given for the delay, but CGS-CIMB Research noted that this could be due to the vape industry players' discontentment over the excise duty rate.

"Even we were negative on the amount that the government had posited at Budget 2022's tabling," it said, noting that the proposed excise duty rate of RM1.20/ml was on the high side.

"It may not seem punishing for closed-system vapes or vape pens, as their gel and liquid are highly durable.

"However, the issue comes for the other vape variations that require more gel and liquid than the closed-system type.

"The retail prices of the existing open-system vapes' liquid bottles can more than double if the RM1.20/ml excise duty is imposed," it explained.

Nonetheless, this indefinite postponement would place BAT's plans to distribute vapes in Malaysia in a limbo.

"The retail prices of the existing open-system vapes' liquid bottles can more than double if the RM1.20/ml excise duty is imposed."

CGS-CIMB Research

That said, the delay should be neutral for the group's prospects as CGS-CIMB pointed out that users would be fiscally burdened by the proposed excise duty rate anyway.

"We think that these industry players were not protesting against the excise duty's imposition. Rather, we believe that they want the industry to be legitimised and regulated – just that the excise duty should not push up the vape liquid's retail prices to levels that the consumers can ill afford."

However, rather than simply revising down the excise duty rate, RMCD is postponing the levy indefinitely.

Based on its conversations with vape industry players, the research house said the government had mulled taxing vape liquid since at least 2015.

It also opined that making vapes unaffordable may spawn a whole new black market, just like the one that has devoured much of the cigarette industry in Malaysia.

The research house has maintained its "hold" call on BAT with a target price of RM14.38 a share.

It believes a re-rating catalyst for the stock will be the government's decision to revise down the excise duty rate on vape liquid.

It cited downside risks to its recommendation include more down-trading to value-for-money cigarettes, and smokers cutting down their cigarette intake once the economy reopens.

AirAsia to table name change proposal at EGM

KUALA LUMPUR: AirAsia Group Bhd, which plans to change its name to Capital A Bhd, will be tabling the proposal at its EGM on Jan 27, 2022 to seek approval from the shareholders.

The budget airline said the name change aimed to have a new corporate identity that offers a better reflection of the group's core business and its future undertakings, in tandem with its rapid transformation as it had gone beyond its beginnings as an airline into a digital travel and lifestyle services group, which continues to gain strong momentum.

"This structural change would help facilitate strong projected growth in our portfolio businesses. We believe that the new company name will further enhance and be in line with our purpose to connect people and transform lives, it will also set the tone of the group as it expands into new horizons and allay concerns of being a group that was intrinsically an airline," it said in the circular to shareholders filed with Bursa Malaysia yesterday.

According to AirAsia, its board, after having considered all aspects of the proposed change of name, is of the opinion that the move is in the best interests of the company.

AirAsia said the EGM, slated to be held on Jan 27, is for the purpose of considering and, if thought fit, passing with or without modifications, the special resolution to give effect to the proposed change of name.

It said the EGM will be conducted as a fully virtual meeting entirely through live streaming from the online meeting platform using the remote participation and voting facilities provided by Tricor Investor & Issuing House Services Sdn Bhd via the TIIH Online website at *https://tiih.online*

AirAsia has, on Monday, announced that it is proposing to change its name to Capital A Bhd, and the proposed name has been approved by the Companies Commission of Malaysia and reserved by the company on Dec 28, 2021.

Short-term rates expected to remain stable

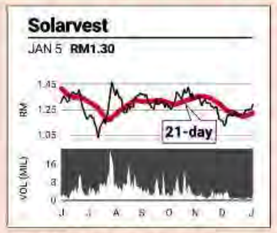
KUALA LUMPUR: Short-term rates are expected to remain stable on Bank Negara's operations to absorb surplus liquidity from the financial system.

Liquidity is estimated at RM45.61bil in the conventional system and RM29.15bil in Islamic funds. The central bank will conduct a range maturity auction money market tender of RM5bil for two to 33 days and one Islamic range maturity auction qard tender of RM4.1bil for seven to 33 days.

It will also conduct a Commodity Murabahah Programme of RM500mil for 93 days and a reverse repo tender of RM240mil for 33 days. — Bernama

Supportline

By FONG MIN YUAN



SOLARVEST Holdings Bhd leapt higher yesterday to cross above the 50 and 100-day simple moving averages (SMA) in a sign of strong bullish sentiment.

The advance helps to confirm the stocks recovery trend after it hit bottom on Dec 6, 2020.

Moving forward, the share price is expected to challenge the overhead resistance at RM1.31 and RM1.37.

Looking at the technical indicators, a bullish pattern is developing with the slow-stochastic returning upright after a brief neutralisation period. It remains robust at 85 points.

The 14-day relative strength index is also bullish at 79 points.

Given the overbought conditions on the indices, the stock could take a breather before it continues its rally but remains on a bullish footing.

Support for the stock is found at RM1.18 and RM1.11

JHM Consolidation Bhd rose yesterday past the 50-day SMA.

Having freed itself of the resistance, the share price is expected to make a challenge of the higher resistance at RM1.94

In the event of a positive crossing, the stock can aim higher at RM2.03.

While overbought, the slows-stochastic continues to advance at 83 points, suggesting further uptrend. The relative strength index (RSI) is also on the verge of overbought at 74 points. Support levels can be pegged to RM1.70 and RM1.63.

MAGNUM Bhd remains on a stellar streak as it continued its recovery trend yesterday to hit a resistance of RM2.

At this level, the stock is challenging a Fibonacci retracement level of 50%, the midway point of the price correction between Oct 28 and Dec 17.

The daily moving average convergence and divergence line indicates the stock will return to an uptrend should it breach the RM2 level, as it makes it way past the zero line.

The slow-stochastic and RSI are both overbought but could remain in extended overbought mode in the event of further buying interest.

Support for the counter lies at RM1.92 and RM1.81.

The comments above do not represent a recommendation to buy or sell.

Garuda to cut liabilities

Airline's creditors vie for cash in US$9.8bil debt revamp

StarAsean+ INDONESIA

JAKARTA: Creditors of PT Garuda Indonesia looking to recoup money in the airline's US$9.8bil (RM41.06bil) debt restructuring must submit their bids by yesterday.

The deadline of 5pm Jakarta time (10am in London) for filing claims will be the first in a series of milestones and months of wrangling that could stretch into September.

The airline is seeking to cut liabilities to US$3.7bil (RM15bil) and renegotiate leasing terms or return planes to aircraft lessors with the smallest penalties possible.

"The government is committed to treat all creditors, foreign and domestic, fairly with the ultimate goal of saving Garuda," Kartika Wirjoatmodjo, a deputy minister at Indonesia's State-Owned Enterprises Ministry told *Bloomberg News* this week.

Already struggling to stay profitable even before the pandemic brought travel to a standstill, Indonesia's flag carrier wants investors to take a haircut for their debt.

That's a lower recovery rate than what some regional peers offered, according to Shukor Yusof, founder of aviation consulting firm Endau Analytics.

The indicated price of Garuda's global sukuk recently fell to record lows , according to prices compiled by *Bloomberg*.

But there's more at stake than financial returns. The 71-year-old airline is a major employer and a vital mode of transport for the country made up of 17,000 islands over an area spanning the distance from New York to London. Indonesia's government is a majority shareholder, so parliament needs to approve big corporate changes.

The airline's fate has already stirred up heated debate in the legislature.

The impact of corruption in the procurement of aircraft and engines, aggressive fleet expansion and high costs have contributed to annual net losses since 2017.

Once creditors' bids are submitted, the focus shifts to Jan 19, when a court-appointed auditor will issue a verdict on whether the claims can go ahead.

Indonesian law provides for a 270-day limit on the restructuring process, meaning that date could well get postponed.

Indonesia's flag carrier is one of many to take a beating due to the pandemic and seek legal relief.

Philippine Airlines Inc will be able to tap US$150mil (RM628mil) in additional financing and cut debt by US$2bil (RM8.2bil) after having won the United States court approval for its reorganisation.

For Garuda, the legal process is key because negotiating individually with a large number of mostly overseas creditors and lessors would take too long.

It faces the risk of losing business should global airline traffic recover unless it can reach an agreement with lessors, from which it secures the majority of its fleet. — Bloomberg

Huarong rescue team hit by US$4bil paper loss

BEIJING: The state-controlled investors that were directed to bail out China Huarong Asset Management Co suffered a loss of more than US$4bil (RM16.7bil) as the asset manager resumed trading after a nine-month suspension.

Huarong slumped as much as 55% in Hong Kong as trading resumed after the firm last week completed a US$6.6bil (RM27.6bil) state-orchestrated bailout. The tumble handed the group of state-backed investors, which had bought a total of 41.2 billion domestic and Hong Kong shares, a combined loss on paper of 26.4 billion yuan (US$4.1bil or RM17.18bil).

Citic Group, now Huarong's second-largest shareholder after the Ministry of Finance following the recapitalisation, saw its investment slide.

China Insurance Rongxin Fund, the third-biggest holder, was also hurt. Nevertheless, representatives from both firms said at a press briefing yesterday that they were optimistic about Huarong's prospects.

"The investment will further strengthen Citic's positions in the bad-asset management sphere and help the group better serve national strategy," said Wei Xu, deputy general manager of the Strategic Development Department at Citic Group. "We're optimistic about the opportunities from distressed markets as well as the future of Huarong."

Temporary setback: People walk past the Huarong Asset Management building in Beijing. Investors of the cash-strapped debt collector are confident about the company's prospects moving forward. — AFP

Rongxin General Manager Luo Yihong said its investment was made from a longer term perspective and is "an example of insurance capital being put to use to maintain financial market stability."

Created following the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s to buy up bad debt from the nation's struggling banks, Huarong had expanded into a financial conglomerate.

It spooked Asian credit markets last year when it failed to report earnings on time, and eventually revealed it had lost about $16 billion (RM67.05bil) in 2020.

The firm ultimately proved too big to fail. Huarong said late Tuesday that it now had taken measures to return to its core business, simplify its structure, reduce capital consumption and boost returns.

It has also embarked on disposals of non-core assets to pare back its sprawling empire. — Bloomberg

Slowing inflation gives Philippines hope to dodge rate-hike wave

MANILA: Philippine inflation was the slowest in a year last month, giving the central bank an opportunity to support growth with record-low interest rates and withstand pressure from a tightening global monetary policy environment.

Consumer prices rose 3.6% from a year ago last month, the statistics agency reported yesterday, the weakest since the same month in 2020 and below the 4.1% median estimate in a *Bloomberg* survey.

The central bank "stands ready" to keep accommodative monetary policy while guarding against risks to prices and financial stability, governor Benjamin Diokno said after the data's release.

"The central bank is sounding dovish still and slowing inflation gives it some room to stay accommodative."

Nicholas Mapa

While supply disruptions due to *Typhoon Rai* last month may temporarily stoke food costs, inflation is seen settling close to the midpoint of the bank's 2%-4% target this year, he said.

Easing inflation was due to slower increases in food and transport costs in December, according to the statistics authority. Full-year 2021 inflation was at 4.5%.

The agency will release inflation data that's rebased to 2018 starting next month when it reports January figures. The central bank has kept its policy rate at a record low 2% for more than a year. Its next meeting is scheduled for Feb 17.

"The central bank is sounding dovish still and slowing inflation gives it some room to stay accommodative.

"However, 2022 may be a different story, as the Federal Reserve may hike interest rates, which could finally prompt the Philippines to reverse course by the end of the second quarter," said Nicholas Mapa of ING Groep NV. — Bloomberg

Subtle word choice revives hope for HK

BEIJING: A subtle word choice in China's revamped rules for overseas listings is stoking speculation that authorities may make it easier for companies to list in Hong Kong than in other offshore financial hubs.

China's top Internet regulator published final regulations Tuesday requiring all companies with more than a million users seeking "foreign" listings to undergo a rigorous data security review starting Feb 15.

That's a notable change from a related November notice, when the same watchdog mentioned Hong Kong listings specifically as requiring scrutiny if they involved matters of national security, and also employed the term "overseas" – often used to describe Hong Kong, a semi-autonomous Chinese city.

The wording has revived hopes that companies seeking Hong Kong listings won't automatically be required to undergo a formal data security review.

It would be welcome news to investors and the Asian financial centre, long the destination of choice for Chinese businesses seeking capital and a global presence.

The pace of major initial public offerings (IPO) all but dried up in 2021 after a plethora of government agencies launched a concerted effort to rein in tech giants – by far the biggest capital-raisers abroad.

Companies seeking Hong Kong listings are "not required" to seek approval on data security based on the regulations finalised Tuesday, said Chen Jihong, a data security lawyer at Beijing-based Zhonglun Law Firm.

That underscores Beijing's heightened support toward Hong Kong and growing confidence about its control over the former British colony, he added.

"Chinese regulators believe data security risk in Hong Kong is not as high as overseas markets," Chen said.

"The Hong Kong capital market will definitely see more opportunities as a result."

US-listed Chinese tech shares including Pinduoduo Inc fell overnight amid a broad selloff in the sector, with traders spooked by a rise in Treasury yields putting pressure on stocks with extended valuations.

Representatives for the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) didn't respond to calls seeking comment. An official at a separate agency handling enquiries for Tuesday's notice said the rules shouldn't encompass Hong Kong listings because "the city isn't a foreign country."

From Alibaba Group Holding Ltd to Tencent Holdings Ltd, China's largest corporations have for two decades employed a range of structures to attract the foreign capital that's been key to their rapid ascent over the past decade.

The rush to list abroad in turn generated billions of dollars for not just technology firms but also their Wall Street backers.

Then Beijing tightened the spigot in 2021. As part of efforts to exert greater control over the troves of data that underpin their growing influence, the CAC in July proposed legislation requiring companies to undergo data security vetting before going public - days after Didi Global Inc proceeded with an IPO despite its objections.

Neither Tuesday's finalised regulations nor the original draft specify a requirement for Hong Kong listings.

At the same time, the American securities watchdog has threatened to toss Chinese companies off bourses unless they comply with US auditing requirements, encouraging more IPO candidates to seek floats closer to home. — Bloomberg

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Korea Zinc invests US$50mil in Energy Vault

Company going green at Australia refinery

StarAsean+ SOUTH KOREA

SEOUL: Korea Zinc has agreed to invest US$50mil (RM209mil) in energy storage developer Energy Vault and use its technology to help decarbonise operations at its zinc refinery in Australia, the two companies said.

Korea Zinc is the latest major company to back Swiss-based Energy Vault, following SoftBank Group Corp, Saudi Aramco and global miner BHP Group, ahead of a planned listing on the New York Stock Exchange this quarter through a special purpose acquisition company Novus Capital .

Korea Zinc's investment increased the amount Energy Vault raised in its private investment in public equity, or Pipe, funding by 50% from its initial target.

"This is a very strong signal for the market from a large strategic (company) and validation of our technology and putting money behind their clean energy transition strategy," Energy Vault chief executive officer Robert Piconi told *Reuters*.

BHP and Korea Zinc are both looking to use renewable power at their mining and smelting sites and to drive electrolysers to make green hydrogen for their trucks.

Energy storage will be crucial to ensure those operations can run 24/7 when the sun is not shining or the wind is not blowing.

Korea Zinc unit Ark Energy, which runs the company's decarbonisation efforts in Australia, likes Energy Vault's storage system as it can provide power for around eight hours compared with batteries, which have much shorter duration.

> ***"This unique solution has the potential to accelerate our energy transition and help us become the most competitive producer of green zinc in the world."***
>
> Daniel Kim

"This is what makes it attractive to us," said Ark Energy's chief executive Daniel Kim.

Korea Zinc aims to make its Sun Metals refinery in Queensland state one of the world's first zinc refineries to produce green zinc, part of the refinery's broader goal to shift to 80% renewable power by 2030 and 100% by 2040.

Storage is key to bringing down the refinery's energy costs, which are 30% of the plant's total costs.

"This unique solution has the potential to accelerate our energy transition and help us become the most competitive producer of green zinc in the world," Kim told *Reuters*, adding, "It's still early days."

The investment in Energy Vault follows Korea Zinc's acquisition through Ark Energy of an Australian wind and solar farm developer.

Energy Vault plans to start building an energy storage system for Sun Metals in mid-2022. The companies have yet to disclose the size or cost of the project.

Energy Vault's EVx storage system works liked pumped hydro, using power when supply is abundant to drive motors and raise 30-tonne blocks, rather than water, up to a height. When power is needed, the blocks are lowered, which releases their potential energy to generate electricity.

Enhancing its green credentials, it has developed composite blocks working with Mexico's Cemex that can be made from soil dug up at the sites where it plans to build its storage systems and materials like mine tailings, coal ash and even decommissioned wind turbine blades.

Piconi said Energy Vault is in talks with other companies in Australia.

"I believe it's going to be one of our largest markets," he said in an interview. — Reuters

Tencent raises US$3bil by trimming stake in S'pore's Sea

SINGAPORE: Chinese gaming and social media company Tencent Holdings Ltd has sold 14.5 million shares in Singapore-based gaming and e-commerce firm Sea Ltd at US$208 (RM871.71) each to raise US$3bil (RM12.57bil), according to a term sheet seen by *Reuters* yesterday.

Tencent said late on Tuesday it had entered into a deal to reduce its stake in the technology group to 18.7% from 21.3%. The company plans to retain the substantial majority of its stake in Sea for the long term.

The sale comes after Tencent said last month it would divest US$16.4bil (RM68.73bil) of its stake in JD.com, weakening its ties to China's second-biggest e-commerce firm, amid pressure from Beijing's broad regulatory crackdown on technology firms.

Sea's shares fell 11.4% on Tuesday in New York following the divestment news. Ahead of the announcement, Sea said Tencent had also agreed to cut its voting stake in the company to less than 10%.

"We believe with a lower voting right control, it could reduce any potential conflict if Tencent's gaming teams plan to publish more games directly in global markets and help reduce any potential geopolitical friction if and when Sea plans to expand more strategically into new markets in more countries," Citi's analysts said in a report yesterday.

Sea said Tencent and its affiliates had given an irrevocable notice to convert all their class B ordinary shares.

Upon conversion, all outstanding class B shares of Sea will be beneficially owned by Forrest Li, the founder, chairman and CEO of Sea, South-East Asia's most valued company, which has a market capitalisation of US$110bil (460bil).

Tencent and Sea declined to comment on the pricing of the share sale.

Sea's shares have shed 47% from a record high struck in October but have still risen five-fold in the past three years.

The company started out as a gaming firm in 2009 and then diversified into e-commerce and food delivery, benefiting from roaring demand for its services from consumers, especially during pandemic-related restrictions.

Sea is now expanding its e-commerce operations globally.

"The divestment provides Tencent with resources to fund other investments and social initiatives," Tencent said in a statement.

It sold the stock at the lower end range when the transaction was launched on Tuesday. The price set was a 6.8% discount to Sea's closing price on Monday.

Tencent's shares fell 3.5% yesterday in a broader market, weighed down by tech stocks. — Reuters

Sony looks to electric cars for its next big hit

TOKYO: Japan's Sony Group Corp plans to launch a company this spring to examine entering the electric vehicle market, looking to harness its strengths in entertainment and sensors to play a bigger role in next-generation mobility.

The new company, Sony Mobility Inc, comes as the Japanese tech giant is "exploring a commercial launch" of electric vehicles, Sony chairman and president Kenichiro Yoshida told a news conference, speaking ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show technology trade fair in Las Vegas.

"With our imaging and sensing, cloud, 5G and entertainment technologies combined with our contents mastery, we believe Sony is well positioned as a creative entertainment company to redefine mobility," he said.

Although its once-dominant position in consumer electronics has been eroded by Asian rivals like South Korea's Samsung Electronics Co, Sony still has an arsenal of sophisticated technology in areas such as sensors critical to autonomous driving.

It also remains one of the world's biggest entertainment companies, home to prominent video game and movie franchises. Audio and entertainment systems are increasingly a focus for next-generation vehicles.

Shares in Sony jumped 4.2% in Tokyo after the electric vehicle plans were announced, easily outpacing a flat Nikkei index.

Yoshida unveiled a prototype sport utility vehicle, the *Vision-S 02*, which uses the same electric vehicle platform as the previously announced *Vision-S 01 coupe* that began testing on public roads in Europe from December 2020.

He said the company saw mobility as an "entertainment space" where passengers could chose individual entertainment options and use 5G Internet connection.

Wall Street is betting heavily on electric cars and the global auto industry has been upended by Tesla Inc, now the world's most valuable automaker. Many investors also expect Apple Inc to launch its own vehicle within the next few years.

Japan's Toyota Motor Corp in December committed US$70bil (RM293bil) to electrify its automobiles by 2030. — Reuters

China Mobile shares jump in first day of trade in Shanghai

SHANGHAI: China Mobile Ltd, the country's largest wireless carrier by sales that was removed from the United States market last year, surged in its first day of trade in Shanghai.

The state-run company, one of the targets of an investment-ban order by former US President Donald Trump, rose as much as 9.4% before paring the advance.

The shares were sold in an offering that is expected to raise 56 billion yuan (US$8.8bil or RM36.8bil) after the company exercises an over-allotment option.

Considering the final amount, the listing is the largest in China in more than a decade. The telecom giant is debuting in its home-country after the New York Stock Exchange suspended trading in the stock about one year ago, along with other two major Chinese state-owned operators, China Telecom Corp and China Unicom Hong Kong Ltd.

China Mobile shares in Hong Kong rose as much as 7.3% after the company said it plans to exercise its powers under a buyback mandate to repurchase up to 2.05 billion shares in the Asian financial hub after Feb 7.

The firm is the latest to join Chinese peers banned in New York in offering shares back home. China Telecom has retreated almost 5% since it listed in Shanghai in August after raising more than US$7bil (RM29.3bil). China United Network Communications Ltd, which was already trading in Shanghai, is down about 7% over the past year.

The world's largest carrier by subscribers, China Mobile has been facing a bulging budget in the country's push to lead the world in 5G and future generations of telecommunication technologies. Last year alone, the company pledged 110 billion yuan (RM72bil) for 5G network construction.

The superfast networks may take years to pay back as consumers are slow to adopt the new technology due to a lack of attractive applications. The Shanghai listing will help China Mobile raise fund for expanding 5G infrastructure and developing uses to make it more profitable.

Proceeds from the listing will be used to fund projects , China Mobile said in its prospectus. The company has also estimated that profit for 2021 could grow up to 8% from a year earlier. — Bloomberg

Impressive debut: Pedestrians walk past a China Mobile dealership in Shanghai. The telecom giant's shares rose 9.4% in its first day of trade yesterday. — Bloomberg

StarAsean+ CHINA

Leading in carbon neutrality with innovation

Tech to play central role in tackling climate change

BEIJING: China is expected to take the lead in achieving carbon neutrality worldwide, not only because the country has taken the helm in renewable energy installed capacity but also due to the government's relentless efforts in technological innovation, industry experts say.

With its goals to peak carbon emissions by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060, China will be the main battlefield for massive technological innovation and application scenarios, said Zou Ji, CEO and president of Energy Foundation China.

The technological innovations will play a central role in tackling climate change and achieving decarbonisation goals in China and the whole world, while further stepping up market transformation and upgrades, Zou said.

China's exploration and utilisation of renewable energy remains the world's largest so far, laying a strong foundation for the country's transition to green and low-carbon energy.

China's installed clean energy capacity reported rapid growth in the January-November period in 2020, with the country's installed wind power capacity soaring 29% year-on-year to 300 million kilowatts and its solar power capacity reaching 290 million kW, up 24.1% from a year earlier, the National Energy Administration said.

Utilising technological innovation to support energy conservation and reduce emissions is increasingly recognised as an indispensable tool in achieving carbon neutrality, said He Kebin, deputy director of the National Experts Committee on Ecological Protection, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, and a professor with the School of Environment at Tsinghua University.

"China has technological advantages in wind and solar power, and its advantages in ultra-high voltage power transmission might also contribute to global carbon neutrality," said He.

The gradual increase of renewable energy, including wind, solar, hydro and nuclear power, and the fading need for fossil fuels during the past three decades, achieving carbon peak and neutrality still requires a lot of effort, experts said.

Zhang Qiang, a professor with the Department of Earth System Science of Tsinghua University, said the challenge for carbon neutrality in China still exists, as thermal power, steel and cement sectors, which have supported economic and social development during the past 30 years, have also brought about massive carbon emissions.

Thermal power, for example, still has new capacities in the country's energy bases including Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces, the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, as well as coastal regions in East China, Zhang said during a recent release of a report on global energy infrastructure carbon emissions by the Tsinghua University Institute for Carbon Neutrality in Beijing.

He said that governments should reverse the inertia of investment in high-carbon energy infrastructure, while accelerating the upgrade and orderly phasing out of energy infrastructure, improving technology and efficiency to lower the intensity of carbon emissions.

Zhang also suggests the increase of research and development of emerging low-carbon technologies, demonstration and application of hydrogen steelmaking, and carbon capture, utilisation and storage to push forward the development of renewable energy. — China Daily

Solid base: A farmer works in a field near solar panels in Hebei. China's exploration and utilisation of renewable energy remains the world's largest so far, laying a strong foundation for the country's transition to green and low-carbon energy. — AFP

New rules prove game-changer in livestreaming

SHANGHAI: Livestreaming has become such an integral part of e-commerce in China that the new format raked in sales worth an estimated 1.2 trillion yuan (US$188.28bil or RM789.97bil), or nearly 9% of the total, by the end of last year.

That piece of data from consultancy iiMedia acquires significance given the fact that in 2017, livestreaming contributed just 0.26%.

Livestreaming's success is partly attributable to the peculiar market situation created by factors relating to the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced the format to quickly evolve from a nice-to-have option to a necessity for brands to power online sales.

Confined to indoors during the pandemic lockdowns, consumers turned to e-commerce for supplies, and the new phenomenon of livestreaming caught on and experienced a meteoric rise, market experts said.

An average of 1.5 million livestreaming sessions were conducted on a daily basis, according to the China Internet Network Information Centre.

What's more, it spawned stars and icons called influencers who can orchestrate online sales worth billions of yuan in a jiffy, themselves becoming multi-millionaires in the process.

Now, new rules and regulator scrutiny are seeking to better regulate the emerging livestreaming segment of the e-commerce sector, the backbone of the retail industry.

A slew of fines were levied on topnotch livestreaming influencers who failed to declare personal income honestly. Hence, they incurred massive backlogs of unpaid taxes, late fees and penalties.

For instance, Huang Wei, an influencer better known by her professional name Viya, was slammed with fines on Dec 20 for hiding her commissions. In her income tax filing, Viya declared personal wages as corporate income, and omitted reports of taxable income between 2019 and 2020.

Just weeks before that, two other notable livestreamers, Zhu Chenhui (better known by her online avatar Xueli Cherie) and Lin Shanshan, were also fined for tax evasion, with their social media accounts and Taobao stores temporarily inaccessible.

> ***"The likes of Viya are concealing personal income and declaring personal wages as income for proprietorships. These are clearly ill-intentioned tax evasion moves that are subject to taxation regulations"***
>
> Ma Kainong

All these influencers were fined by the local taxation authorities in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, where e-commerce giant Alibaba has its headquarters.

These events sent shock waves across the country's livestreaming sector, said Ma Kainong, a lawyer at Zhejiang Zeda Law Firm. He said he believes the moves were essential to restoring market order.

"The likes of Viya are concealing personal income and declaring personal wages as income for proprietorships.

"These are clearly ill-intentioned tax evasion moves that are subject to taxation regulations," said Ma, adding such violations have disrupted the order of tax collection and undermined market environment for fair competition.

In a note explaining the rationale for fining Viya, the Zhejiang Taxation Service said the current decision is for the long-term benign development of the platform economy.

Meanwhile, taxation authorities should implement all favourable policies possible to optimise services and create a sound taxation environment.

Despite an obscure start in 2016, livestreaming has mushroomed into a common practice for consumer brands over the years to retain existing users and to attract new ones.

For consumers, livestreaming provides immersive experiences and personalised recommendations from key opinion leaders, or KOLs, and other hosts, and serves as an entertaining alternative to physical shopping trips, said Derek Deng, partner of Bain & Co, who leads the consultancy's consumer products practice in China.

Unique personas hold the key to diverting online traffic to virtual livestreaming rooms, which have the potential to become cash cows for livestreamers.

According to Mo Daiqing, senior analyst at Hangzhou-based Internet Economy Institute, leading livestreaming hosts such as Viya and Li Jiaqi (who is known for his incomparable techniques for selling lipstick) carry typical "rags to riches "stories that in part boost and solidify their cult following.

"So, this wave of tax evasion incidents is expected to deal a huge blow to these icons," said Mo.

"Viya's Taobao Live account has over 90 million followers. It might be time that they knock her off the pedestal."

In addition to severe dents in personal image, hosts are facing increasing conflicts with the very brands they endorse over the split of profits and the fight for user loyalty, Deng said.

"For example, goods promoted by KOLs are usually sold at deep discounts and require commissions as high as 30% as well as a listing fee to advertise," Deng said.

"Moreover, by selling via a KOL's livestreaming room, brands lack full access to the consumer data that has become critical to re-targeting and retention." — China Daily/ANN

List-based management policy to foster fairer market

SHANGHAI: China will practice list-based management for all items requiring administrative approval.

The move is meant to regulate the exercise of power and provide more benefits for enterprises and more accessible services to the public, the State Council executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided.

The meeting also decided to implement category-based management of corporate credit risks to make oversight fairer and more efficient.

"Both decisions are aimed at fostering a market-oriented, law-based and internationalised business environment, continuing to deepen the reform of government functions and lower government-imposed transaction costs, which are of great significance," Li said.

"They are also required by the urgent needs at present, as market expectations now are relatively weak."

The meeting adopted the List of Items Requiring Administrative Approval Stipulated by Laws, Administrative Regulations and State Council Decisions (2022 Edition).

The meeting required all provinces, cities and counties to finish compiling their own lists of items by the end of the year.

The essential information covered by the lists should be broadly uniform across the country to ensure that the same approval item will be processed according to the same standards in different regions.

No administrative approval will be required or implemented on any item outside the lists.

"Lower and predictable government-imposed transaction costs will enhance public confidence in the market and better unlock market vitality and social creativity," Li said. "Rolling out these two policies now is enabled by the groundwork laid in the past. — China Daily/ANN

General Motors yields US sales crown to Toyota

Detroit automaker's run dating to 1931 ends

Leading the way: Vehicles at the Joe Myers Toyota dealership in Houston. Toyota sold 2.3 million vehicles in the US in 2021, surpassing General Motors in auto sales. – AFP

NEW YORK: Toyota Motor Corp grabbed the United States sales crown from General Motors Co (GM), swiping an honour that the Detroit automaker has held since Herbert Hoover was president.

If GM's explanation is to be believed – that its 43% fourth-quarter sales decline and 13% tumble for the year stemmed from a semiconductor shortage – then last year's sales race was really a supply-chain pageant. Whoever could best cajole stretched chip producers for more product came out a winner.

Navigating the squeeze has been a nightmare for the auto industry, and especially for US carmakers. While GM's sales fell for the year, Toyota, Honda Motor Co and Nissan Motor Co posted gains.

Toyota may not be No. 1 – the spot GM had occupied beginning in 1931 – for long.

"We see it as not sustainable," Jack Hollis, the company's senior vice-president of automotive operations, said without elaborating on Tuesday at a briefing for reporters.

GM agreed. Steve Carlisle, the carmaker's president for North America, said the company will increase sales this year. Most major automakers reported fourth-quarter US sales on Tuesday, with Stellantis NV, which owns the *Jeep* and *Ram* brands, posting full-year sales down 2% and an 18% drop in the last quarter. Ford Motor Co is expected to release its figures late yesterday.

To retake its leadership position, GM will have to return to something closer to the 2.5 million vehicles the company delivered in 2020. Before the Covid-19 pandemic and semiconductor shortage hit, GM sold about 2.9 million vehicles in 2019.

"Our dealers and our engineering, supply chain, manufacturing and brand teams moved mountains to satisfy as many customers as possible in 2021" Carlisle said in a statement. "In 2022, we plan to take advantage of the strong economy and anticipated improved semiconductor supplies to grow our sales and share."

Market share is vital to GM's long-range target of doubling revenue to US$280bil (RM1.17bil). That will require keeping buyers of gasoline-burning cars and trucks and stealing new ones who want electric vehicles.

And as production recovers, GM may not want every sale it can get. Domestic automakers typically keep 80 days worth of vehicles on dealer lots, while Japanese automakers keep as few as 50 days worth available. Thinner inventory allows for better pricing and fatter profits.

Consumers today are paying record prices, since automakers don't need rebates and dealers don't need to bargain heavily.

"The domestic producers will run at 50 to 60 days instead of 80 even if it means smaller market share," said *Bloomberg Intelligence* analyst Kevin Tynan. "It may mean that they're not the top volume automaker, but they will be much healthier from a financial perspective."

For Toyota to stay in the lead it would need a much bigger slice of the US market than it's had before. Toyota's share inched up to 14.3% in 2020 from 14% in 2018. GM was 17.3%, little changed from the 17.1% notched in 2018, according to *Bloomberg Intelligence*.

Overall, it was a tough year for the industry and ended on a sour note. Carmakers likely sold a seasonally adjusted annual rate of about 12.5 million new vehicles in December, down 23% from a year earlier, according to the average forecast of six market researchers surveyed by *Bloomberg*.

Stellantis saw shrinking sales for most of its nameplates, but the *Ram* pickup brand eked out a positive year, with sales up 4% in 2021, while the hybrid *Pacifica* minivan drove Chrysler brand sales higher. In the fourth quarter, growing deliveries of the all-new *Grand Cherokee SUV* were offset by steep declines for two other Jeeps: the *Wrangler SUV* and *Gladiator* pickup.

For the full year, US auto sales likely came to 14.9 million vehicles, up 2.5% from the coronavirus-stricken days of 2020, according to Cox Automotive. Automakers typically sell more than 16 million vehicles a year.

The chip shortage forced GM to allocate supply to its most profitable vehicles. Fourth-quarter sales of the *Chevy Silverado* fell more than 30% and tumbled 21% for the *GMC Sierra*, but a spokesman said the company still sold more full-size pickups than anyone.

Sales climbed for the *Chevy Tahoe* and *Suburban*, the *GMC Yukon* and the *Cadillac Escalade* large sport utility vehicles – the company's most profitable models.

Toyota's strong 2021 performance was buoyed by sales of sedans such as the *Corolla* and *Camry*. The *RAV4* remained the automaker's top-selling vehicle, though its sales dropped 5% for the year. Sales of the *Corolla* and *Camry* rose 5% and 6.6%, respectively.

Nissan's sales dropped 20% in the fourth quarter but rose 8.7% for the year. The *Nissan Rogue* and *Kicks* small SUVs were strong sellers.

Judy Wheeler, vice-president of sales for Nissan, said the company has been working to allocate scant semiconductors to the vehicles that it needs most, but that's not always possible. She compared the puzzle to lining up the colors on a rubik's cube.

"Each month has gotten stronger," she said. "Our next quarter will be better as far as production. We believe we'll be back to normal production levels. It may not be the ideal mix, but production levels will be normal."

Honda also boosted sales for the year despite a sharp drop at the end. December's tally fell 23% sales rose 8.9% for the year.

The *CR-V* compact crossover led deliveries, rising 8.3%. The *Civic* compact and *Accord* midsize sedans also did well, continuing the dominance of Asian brands in the segment. Among Honda's biggest gainers: its *Ridgeline* pickup and *Passport* midsize SUV, both of which were redesigned to showcase more rugged looks.

Hyundai Motor Co's namesake brand was one of the big winners last year, logging a 19% increase. But the Korean automaker also lost steam as the year wound down, with a 23% plunge in December sales contributing to a 15% decline in the fourth quarter.

Hyundai had comparable inventory levels as Japanese competitors but maximised tight inventory by shifting its retail strategy.

"You get better at online retailing and get better at pre-selling your pipeline," said Randy Parker, senior vice-president of sales at Hyundai Motor America. "That's exactly what we did, and that helped fuel our success in a very difficult year." — Bloomberg

Stellantis' Chrysler brand to go all electric by 2028

AMSTERDAM: Automaker Stellantis' Chrysler brand said yesterday it plans to shift to an all-electric lineup by 2028 and introduce new products, including a utility vehicle, as it moves forward, the North American brand's chief executive said.

> ***"We are completely transforming the portfolio for Chrysler between 2025 and 2028, and beyond."***
>
> Chris Feuell

Chrysler is scheduled to show the *Airflow* concept vehicle at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, offering a view into the brand's design direction as it looks to remake itself and boost sales, Chris Feuell said in an interview.

The plan is for the brand to offer its first electric vehicle (EV) by 2025 and add additional EV's as it shifts from a lineup with gasoline-powered engines.

"We are completely transforming the portfolio for Chrysler between 2025 and 2028, and beyond," Feuell said in an interview.

Chrysler first used the *Airflow* name on a sleek, streamlined sedan in the mid-1930s.

Stellantis said last July it planned to invest more than €30bil (US$33.8bil or RM142bil) through 2025 on electrifying its vehicle lineup.

Alfa Romeo is scheduled to be the first Stellantis brand in North America to be all electric in 2027.

The company, formed in January 2021 from the merger of Italian-American automaker Fiat Chrysler and France's PSA, said it is targeting more than 70% of sales in Europe and over 40% in the United States to be low-emission vehicles – either battery or hybrid electric – by 2030.

It previously said all 14 of its vehicle brands, including Chrysler, would offer fully electrified vehicles.

The automaker has said its EVs will be built on four electric platforms and have driving ranges of 500 to 800 km (300 to 500 miles) on a single charge.

Most new Chrysler vehicles will be built on the large EV platform, Feuell said.

Last May, Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares said each of the company's brands would receive funding over the next 10 years to prove themselves.

Feuell, who joined the automaker last September, declined to say how much investment the Chrysler brand will receive, but said the lineup will expand beyond the 300 sedan and *Pacifica* minivan.

Chrysler sold over 115,000 vehicles last year in the United States, mostly the 300 and *Pacifica*.

That was a far cry from the almost 650,000 vehicles sold in 2005, when the lineup also included the *Crossfire* sports car, *PT Cruiser* compact car and *Sebring* car.

According to research firm AutoForecast Solutions, Chrysler will end production of the 300 sedan in December 2023 and begin production of a utility it has listed as the *Airflow* in July 2024 at its Belvidere, Illinois, plant. Chrysler has not confirmed those plans.

And the existing models will get remakes meant to improve the consumer experience, including new seating configurations and integration of such technology as over-the-air software updates and artificial intelligence-based applications like navigation, voice assistance, e-commerce and payment services, Feuell said.

Customisation will be a key element.

"Chrysler hasn't been a brand that's been invested in over the last 10 years," she said.

"Part of restoring and revitalising the brand is about product but it's about the customer experience as well." — Reuters

Deere's fully autonomous tractor on fields

LAS VEGAS: Self-driving vehicles are moving off the roads and onto the fields.

Deere & Co, the largest farm equipment manufacturer in the world, unveiled a fully autonomous tractor yesterday, propelling it past rivals in the tech space.

The company introduced the technology on its iconic *8 series* tractor, which it says can be controlled from farmers' mobile phones.

Humans will need to transport the machine to a field and configure it for an autonomous run, but then they can let the tractor plant seeds, spray nutrients and harvest crops down to one inch of accuracy without touching a steering wheel, the company said.

The announcement, made at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) 2022 in Las Vegas, thrusts the town of Moline, Illinois-based Deere further into so-called precision agriculture – a key way for farmers to improve harvests without using more labour. The autonomous tractor will be available for purchase later this year.

"Without this self-driving technology, farming is incredibly exhausting mentally and physically," Jahmy Hindman, Deere's chief technology officer, said during the CES presentation.

"You'll find some of the most advanced robotic machines are being used on the farm to feed the world." — Bloomberg

Oil steadies after Opec+ adds more output as market tightens

SINGAPORE: Oil was steady in early Asian trading after the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies (Opec+) agreed to a scheduled increase in production for next month, and an industry report pointed to another decline in United States crude inventories.

Futures in New York traded near US$77 (RM322.67) a barrel after rising 2.4% over the past two sessions.

Opec+ stuck to its plan to lift output by 400,000 barrels a day for February after it cut estimates for a surplus in the first quarter.

The American Petroleum Institute (API) reported US stockpiles fell by 6.43 million barrels last week, according to people familiar with the data.

> ***"The move has provided some comfort to the market, as it signals that Opec+ are not worried about the outlook in the short term."***
>
> Warren Patterson

Oil has made a positive start to the year as concerns about the hit to demand from the Omicron virus variant eased and major economies continue to rebound from the pandemic, although there's still some uncertainty in China.

Earlier this week, the small Chinese city of Yuzhou went into lockdown after a few virus cases, while Xi'an has seen prolonged restrictions after a flare-up.

"The move has provided some comfort to the market, as it signals that Opec+ are not worried about the outlook in the short term," said Warren Patterson, head of commodities strategy at ING Groep NV.

"However, we still need to keep a close eye on China, given reports that another city went into lockdown."

While Opec+ has agreed to add 400,000 barrels a day in February, the actual volume could be much less due to some members struggling to hit production targets.

Energy Aspects Ltd co-founder Amrita Sen predicts the alliance will increase output by 250,000 barrels a day next month.

US gasoline stockpiles, meanwhile, increased by 7.06 million barrels last week, while inventories of distillates – a category that includes diesel – rose by 4.38 million barrels, the API reported. — Bloomberg

Latest Covid-19 wave hurting US labour supply

Data shows record resignations, hiring slowing down

Taking a hit: A 'Now Hiring' sign outside a petrol station in Seymour, Indiana. Data shows US employment edging down through December, coinciding with a record outbreak of coronavirus infections driven by the Omicron variant. – Bloomberg

WASHINGTON: Record numbers of United States workers leaving their jobs and a slowdown in hiring at front-line businesses may show that the latest Covid-19 wave is denting labour supply, possibly pushing the Federal Reserve (Fed) further toward concluding that employment is nearing its practical limits.

Hiring data tracked by business payroll managers Homebase and UKG showed employment edging down through December, coinciding with a record outbreak of coronavirus infections driven by the Omicron variant.

Data from both firms showed larger seasonal dips this year than in 2020, with employment in Homebase's sample of smaller businesses falling around 15% in the last days of 2021 compared to a roughly 10% drop last year.

UKG saw shift work across a variety of industries fall 1.7% in December versus a 0.3% decline in the same period last year and a 0.8% drop in December 2019.

"The data shows a strong downward shift starting in mid-December," wrote Dave Gilbertson, vice-president at UKG.

At the same time, new government data for November showed workers walking away from jobs in record numbers, particularly from lower-paid and often front-line service-sector positions where health risks are considered more acute and work-from-home options less available.

With job openings still near record levels and consumer demand holding up despite the wave of infections, economists say it could mean more pressure on companies to raise wages and more pressure on the Fed to declare that its goal of "maximum employment" was close to being met, if not exceeded already.

Meeting that goal is one of the US central bank's precursors to raising interest rates, and policymakers at the Fed's Dec 14-15 meeting indicated they felt that key benchmark was close.

Minutes of that meeting were scheduled to be released yesterday, providing more details of a session where the Fed began a more concerted fight against inflation that is running at nearly three times its targeted rate of 2% a year and laid the groundwork for an interest rate increase as early as March.

In an essay published on the website Medium, Minneapolis Fed president Neel Kashkari, prominent among Fed officials who have wanted to delay interest rate increases in hopes of encouraging more job growth, said that as of last month's meeting he had pencilled in two rate hikes for 2022 in part because of doubts about how many people will be willing to return to work soon.

"Wages are now climbing rapidly across various income categories," Kashkari wrote in explaining the sharp change in his policy outlook.

"The labour market has not fully recovered from the Covid-19 shock ... But how long it is going to take for all prior workers to return is unclear. For now, at least, it appears demand for workers exceeds the supply."

The US Labour Department is due to release its December employment report tomorrow.

How the wave of Omicron infections influences the economy and the Fed remains in flux. Some analysts have trimmed their economic growth forecasts for 2022 as a result of the latest turn in the pandemic but not by much given the scale of infections now eclipsing prior outbreaks. — Reuters

New York City economic recovery to lag until 2025

NEW YORK: New York City mayor Eric Adams faces a longer-than-expected Covid recovery with a nearly US$3bil (RM12.57bil) budget gap next year and a labour force that isn't expected to reach pre-pandemic levels until 2025, the city's Independent Budget Office (IBO) says in its latest economic forecast.

Rising tax revenue could mitigate some of the pain but Adams will be forced to make tough choices over balancing the budget without the billions of federal aid that has masked much of the city's underlying fiscal uncertainty, the IBO said.

While former mayor Bill de Blasio's administration managed to avoid tax hikes or service cuts because of the federal pandemic-related stimulus relief, Adams will have to contend with projected budget shortfalls amid a record level of Covid-19 cases.

He'll also have to negotiate new contracts with municipal workers and fund programmes that may require new revenue sources.

"The increasingly unpredictable nature of the spread of Covid-19 variants continues to confound economic forecasts and will remain one of – if not the primary – risk to the stability of the city's financial plan," the IBO said.

While Wall Street profits and residential real estate sales have thrived, New York could face fiscal pressure as federal aid is drawn down and certain tax collections shrink.

Before the rise of new virus variant, the IBO had forecast that the city would reach pre-pandemic employment by the middle of 2024.

Now, the IBO anticipates that the economic recovery in New York will continue to lag behind the rest of the nation with expectations that it will take until the end of 2025 for the city to rebuild its pre-pandemic labour force.

It also anticipates real property tax, personal income tax collections, and corporate tax revenue to decline in 2022.

The outlook however is expected to improve in 2023 with the strongest rebounds anticipated with year-over-year tax revenue growth in sales, personal income, property tax, and hotel occupancy collections, according to the latest forecast. — Bloomberg

Adam Neumann's next act after WeWork includes apartment rentals

NEW YORK: Adam Neumann is remaking himself as a residential kingpin, purchasing stakes in thousands of apartments across the United States.

He sees his role as landlord as part of a larger business strategy that's yet to be revealed, said a person familiar with his holdings.

Since Neumann was ousted from WeWork Inc in 2019, he has amassed dozens of investments in startups and laid roots for new ventures of his own, said the person, who asked not to be identified because the plans are unfinished.

The billionaire and entities tied to him have purchased stakes in more than 4,000 apartments valued in excess of US$1bil (RM4.19bil), the person said. Many of the units are located in southern US cities including Atlanta and Miami.

A spokesman for Neumann declined to comment. The real estate investments were reported earlier Tuesday by the *Wall Street Journal*.

"Since the spring of 2020, we have been excited about multifamily apartment living in vibrant cities where a new generation of young people increasingly are choosing to live," D.J. Mauch, a partner at Neumann's family office, told the *Journal*. "We're excited to play a role in that future."

Neumann sought to redesign the modern workplace with WeWork, an office space rental company he started. It eventually became known as much for its free-flowing booze as for its fleeting US$47bil (RM196.95bil) valuation. At WeWork, Neumann explored an interest in residential spaces with a business called WeLive.

The company opened a small number of communal apartments, sort of like college dorms for adults. WeLive didn't go very far and was shuttered after the company hit turbulence. The co-working startup nearly ran out of cash in 2019 after its initial public offering (IPO) went sideways.

The IPO prospectus showed mounting losses and myriad conflicts of interest, including real estate transactions between Neumann and the company that drew fire from prospective investors.

WeWork finally went public late last year at a reduced valuation of US$9bil (RM37.71bil). It has since fallen to US$6.6bil (RM27.66bil). — Bloomberg

Citi's Chronert boosts S&P 500 target, yielding to strong rally

NEW YORK: Just two days into 2022, Scott Chronert gave up on what had appeared to be a too conservative market view after US stocks rounded out a third year of monster gains.

The Citigroup Inc strategist increased his year-end target for the S&P 500 to 5,100 from 4,900, citing an earnings expansion that could last for at least two more years.

While keeping his 2022 earnings forecast at US$220 (RM921.91) a share, Chronert says an early look at 2023 profit growth suggests "solid follow-through."

"The fourth-quarter results should support the recent market action, while 2022 outlooks should generally provide comfort in follow-through, despite ongoing Covid pandemic and supply-chain concerns," Chronert wrote in a note to clients.

> ***"We remain moderately constructive on the broader market outlook."***
>
> Scott Chronert

"Thus, we remain moderately constructive on the broader market outlook, while acknowledging valuation headwinds as the Fed moves down a more hawkish path."

The new projection represents a 6.4% gain from Tuesday's close and puts it at the high end of a forecast range from strategists polled by *Bloomberg*.

In a December survey, Wall Street prognosticators on average expected the S&P 500 to end this year at 4,950, with the highest sitting at 5,330 and the lowest at 4,400.

Last year, the S&P 500 surged 27%, crushing the highest prediction that strategists made last January.

The relentless rally has made it hard to be an equities sceptic.

Bears have been driven to near-extinction, with almost every attempt to bet against the market thwarted. — Bloomberg

ANZ Australian job ads slip 5.5% on Omicron

There is uncertainty over the availability of workers

SYDNEY: A closely-watched gauge of Australian job vacancies fell last month after surging in November as the rapidly spreading Omicron variant of coronavirus dampened sentiment.

Australia & New Zealand (ANZ) Banking Group Ltd's index of help-wanted ads declined 5.5% in December from an upwardly revised 17.2% jump over the previous two months.

Vacancies are still 36.8% above their pre-pandemic level.

December's fall probably also reflects the fact that the number of advertised positions filled exceeded the number of jobs newly advertised, as the index measures the stock of ads, Catherine Birch, a senior economist at ANZ, said in yesterday's release.

"But it's also possible that businesses have become more hesitant to hire due to the spread of Omicron and the consequent uncertainty around consumer behaviour and worker availability," Birch pointed out.

ANZ data shows a much sharper than previous years drop in spending after the key Christmas and Boxing Day trading, partly in response to surging Omicron cases across Australia.

Birch held out hope for a turn in sentiment.

"Looking ahead, we expect the job-switching rate to pick up in 2022," Birch said.

"With so much competition for labour and workers feeling secure in their jobs we should see more people moving to better jobs and asking for larger pay rises in 2022, contributing to stronger wages growth."

Cautious outlook: A file picture showing people queuing outside a welfare centre in Melbourne during the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The rapidly spreading Omicron variant is dampening sentiment. — AFP

The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) has left interest rates at a record low 0.1% since November 2020 awaiting a pick-up in wages growth and inflation.

Governor Philip Lowe reckons it will take about two years for the economy's strength to translate into faster price gains and rate lift-off. The next RBA board meeting is on Feb 1. — Bloomberg

Palantir and Hyundai Heavy Industries to form data pact

SEOUL: Palantir Technologies Inc plans to build a new big data platform in partnership with South Korea's Hyundai Heavy Industries Group. The move could position Palantir to boost its growing commercial business outside the United States.

Hyundai Heavy will use Palantir's data analysis software to improve the way its affiliate groups operate in fields including shipbuilding, offshore engineering and energy and industrial machinery processes, the companies announced Tuesday at the CES trade show in Las Vegas.

The multiyear deal is valued at more than US$25mil (RM104.78mil), according to a source.

Once the platform is built, the companies will create a joint venture to commercialise the new tools, a move that could help Palantir software gain traction with global industrial companies. Chief operating officer Shyam Sankar said the project represented a new model, allowing customers to only pay for what they use, and exercise more control over the process.

Although Palantir raised its 2021 outlook, in its most recent earnings report, the company produced slimmer-than-expected profit margins.

It also failed to more quickly expand its client base from the US government and its allies.

Since the company announced its third-quarter results in November – and disclosed more than a dozen new commercial clients that signed deals worth over US$10mil (RM41.91mil) – its share price has fallen 25%. — Bloomberg

Treasury yield curve steepens on bet Fed sticks to hawkish path

NEW YORK: The bond market has wasted little time pushing Treasury yields sharply higher in the early days of 2022, underscoring concern that elevated inflation will spur more aggressive monetary-policy tightening from the Federal Reserve (Fed).

The jump has been led by the 10 and 30-year benchmarks, steepening the yield curve in a sign traders expect economic growth and high inflation won't be derailed by the record surge in the Omicron variant of the coronavirus. That outlook may be underscored by the release of the Federal Open Market Committee's (FOMC) minutes of its December meeting, when it decided to move more quickly to wind down the bond-buying spree ushered in after the onset of the pandemic.

"Omicron may slow economic activity in January, but we are seeing evidence that the variant is milder and that raises the prospect of clearer sailing for the global economy this year," said David Kelly, chief global strategist at JPMorgan Asset Management Inc in New York. In that scenario, the present low level of Treasury yields means "it doesn't take much to push them higher."

The yield on the US 10-year note held at 1.65% yesterday, after climbing to 1.68% a day earlier. The surge from its Dec 31 close of 1.51% is pushing it toward 2021's closing high of 1.74% set in March. The 30-year bond yield has risen to 2.05%, just shy of its October closing high of 2.16%.

"Even if economic growth is slowed by the Omicron variant, the Fed's concerns about inflation should be enough to keep tightening on track," Deborah Cunningham, chief investment officer of global liquidity markets at Federated Hermes, wrote in a client note Tuesday.

"Yield curves have already responded by steepening, and we expect that to continue."

Although the recent trend of rising long-term inflation expectations abated Tuesday after a factory gauge for December showed a decline in prices paid by manufacturers, the widely followed relationship between two- and 10-year Treasury yields remains appreciably steeper at around 0.9 percentage points, up from late December's low of a little over 0.7 percentage points. For much of last year, the yield curve flattened after a surge in 10-year yields peaked at the end of March, with the bond market pricing in a shallow path of rate tightening.

Investor sentiment has also been damped by a rush among companies to sell new debt before yields rise further.

"While the Fed's hawkish pivot at its December meeting provides a fundamental reason for higher Treasury yields, we believe increased corporate supply and rate lock hedging amid limited liquidity is driving this early-year surge," said Prashant Newnaha, an Asia-Pacific rates strategist at TD Securities in Singapore.

At present, the bond market anticipates three quarter-point Fed rate increases during 2022, endorsing the trajectory forecast by policy makers last month. But debate is brewing over whether the first move will come in May or as soon as March.

The release of the FOMC minutes is just one signpost for bond investors. It will be followed by the monthly payrolls report on Friday and consumer-price inflation data next week, both of which may help clarify when the tightening cycle will commence.

"Labour-market tightness and labour cost pressures will be a major theme in the run-up to the first Fed tightening," said Lou Crandall, chief economist at Wrightson ICAP LLC.

Unless Omicron derails the economy, Crandall thinks Fed officials may decide at their late January meeting that "asset purchases will fall to zero after the February purchase cycle," setting the stage for a first rate hike in March.

Given the Fed's recent focus on taming inflation, the risk for the bond market is that long-dated yields are set to push past last year's peaks until the scope of the economic rebound, inflationary pressure and the bank's policy response are clarified.

"You only reduce inflationary pressure by slowing aggregate demand and that requires higher long-term rates," JPMorgan's Kelly said.

"There will be no impact on curbing inflation if long-term rates are not pushed up. The Fed is quite capable of pushing up long-term rates if it decides to reduce the size of its balance sheet along with higher overnight rates."

For now, the Fed has spelled out a clear path of concluding its monthly bond buying in March and then assessing matters before it starts to raise overnight rates.

December's FOMC minutes will give investors an opportunity to assess how worried the central bank is about inflation and rising employment costs, as well as why those forces pushed it to embark on a faster pace of tapering and to upgrade its estimated tightening path to six rate hikes by the end of 2023. — Bloomberg

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SHOWBIZ

Photo: AFP

After a two-year hiatus, popular Korean actor Byun Yo-han is back with more vigour and a positive attitude.

By MUMTAJ BEGUM
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SOUTH Korean actor Byun Yo-han told *StarLifestyle* exclusively that he doesn't put pressure on himself to live up to other people's expectations.

That self-imposed stress is something he did away with, after taking a two-year break recently to re-examine his approach to acting.

"During the break, I took time to introspect and think about projects. It gave me the chance to gain a positive outlook in various aspects including mental and physical health," he said in the email interview.

The 35-year-old has been in the entertainment industry for a decade now, after making his debut in the 2011 indie film *Working On Holiday*.

He rose to fame in 2014 when he held a supporting role in the popular office K-drama *Misaeng: Incomplete Life*.

Other serials he's appeared in include *Six Flying Dragons* and *Mr. Sunshine*. He has also starred in various films.

He worked so much that he put out at least two features every year; in 2012 alone, he acted in five films.

In a recent interview, the Incheon-native confessed that he likes hard-working people, a trait he obviously has too.

But, Byun – who constantly worried about "good acting" and pushed himself even though many around him told him not to be so hard on himself – felt burned out.

His last project before giving up acting temporarily was 2018's short film *My Dream Class*.

"After a few years of acting, I was tired and felt like I needed time to reassess my career," he said in a 2021 interview with *The Korea Times*.

During that time away from movie sets, he kept in touch with his fans via social media – the actor with a serious demeanour started his Instagram account (@byunyohan_official) on May 2, 2018.

One of the posts he put up that year had a caption that read: "In the making. I can't wait to see you all too. Just give it a while ... I'm going to be good."

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Taking a healthy approach

Byun said that he could relate to his character in *On The Line* as his mother was targeted once by fraudsters. — Handout

A lot of the posts he shared on Instagram then revolved around him and his dog, Bokja.

In a February 2020 interview with *Marie Claire*, he was quoted: "While raising a dog, I'm learning once again how joyful it is to be giving love as well as receiving love.

"Since I receive lots of love as an actor, there are times when I sometimes forget about that gratitude ... I want to become a healthy actor who can give back the love I have received."

Maybe that's why Byun also posted lighthearted videos of him playing the drums – quite skillfully too – and the caption for several photos had him wishing his followers well.

Thankfully, he returned to acting in 2020 with a new drive and hunger.

Byun revealed to *StarLifestyle*: "I am back to dedicating myself to acting after gaining my own knowhow on managing the work, thanks to the break."

His first project after the hiatus was a black-and-white film titled *The Book Of Fish*, which was released in March last year.

For the role, Byun won the Best Actor title at the Busan Film Critics Award, and received nominations in the same category at Baeksang Arts Awards, Blue Dragon Film Awards and Buil Film Awards.

Another film he's involved in is the action-packed crime thriller *On The Line*, and the reason he's speaking to *StarLifestyle*.

He has two films scheduled for 2022 – *She's Dead* and *Hansan*.

"After the two-year break, I have worked constantly. I have worked on seven projects in a row and I think I wouldn't have enough energy without that break," he stated.

According to him, it's a conceit to challenge a role beyond his capability. Instead he only wants to "do it right as an actor".

"Nowadays, I try to avoid using my energy excessively," he added.

"I want to choose roles that I can fully portray and that is within my capacity.

"After all, the success of a project is not something you can change with your will. So, I will keep doing what I'm supposed to do.

"I think focusing on what you can do is important," he reasoned.

At the same time, he admitted that he wants to keep challenging himself in his chosen path and constantly develop his skills as an actor.

For example, with *On The Line*, he got to execute a lot of action sequences, as well as explore gut-wrenching dramatic scenes.

His co-star Kim Moo-yul told *StarLifestyle* that although Byun shouldered most of the scenes in *On The Line*, he always made the time to be present on set even for scenes that didn't involve his character.

"And he would always compliment our performances. He became like the first audience member of the film to me.

"I think his sincerity comes from the fact he really respects his co-stars. I found that impressive.

On The Line, directed by Kim Gok and his twin brother Kim Sun, takes the audience to the world of scammers, specifically voice phishing and phone fraud – problems that have become so prevalent in South Korea.

Byun plays Han Seo-joon, a construction worker, whose wife becomes a victim of voice phishing scam that costs the couple their savings.

Determined to get his hard-earned money back, Seo-joon infiltrates the scammers' headquarters in China.

To ensure the scenes pulsate reality throughout its running time, Byun performed most of the action sequences himself.

In a more recent interview with *The Korea Times*, Byun said that he could relate to his character as his mother was targeted once by fraudsters. Fortunately, his mother didn't fall for their tricks.

The fact that the criminals are targeting anyone and everyone is one of the reasons why Byun was keen to participate in the movie.

"I wanted to raise awareness about the voice phishing crime through my character," he noted to *StarLifestyle*.

"I hope that the audiences watching the movie would realise the seriousness of voice phishing crime. And that the film provides catharsis to the victims."

With Byun giving his all to every character he plays, he detailed what it entails in bringing a character to life: "There are numerous thoughts and inner conflicts during the process of building a character. All of this helps me in finishing the project well.

"While I have no interest in revisiting a character I have already portrayed – because I have already done it – I do extract (traits) from my previous portrayals to get a better idea for the portrayal of my next character."

Meanwhile actor Kim deduced why Byun is always watchable in whatever show he's in.

"Byun is an actor who does not play it safe. I can guarantee the audience could feel that when watching this film," said Kim.

Catch *On The Line* now on Tonton Cinema and On Demand on Unifi TV.

Bad guy

Photo: Handout

By MUMTAJ BEGUM
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IN order to tackle the role of a villain, actors would never view the character as the bad guy but instead would provide reasons as to why he or she is behaving badly.

Likewise, Korean actor Kim Moo-yul (pic) admitted to *StarLifestyle* that he tried to understand his character Pro Kwak in the movie *On The Line*. However, he didn't quite succeed. And Kim is no stranger to playing such a role as he did so in the drama *Bad Guys: Vile City*.

The actor who turns 40 in May this year, said via email: "I usually try to understand the character and sympathise with him, in order to really immerse myself into the character.

"However, the Pro Kwak role required much more effort to understand than any other roles. And yet, despite this extra effort, I still struggled to sympathise with him.

"So, in order to really play the part, I built the character by maximising my imagination and asking 'just how evil can a human being be?'"

On The Line explores the world of voice phishing, showing how extensively the perpetrators do their research in order to con people out of their money.

Pro Kwak is one of the managers at a branch in China who comes up with different scenarios and scripts for callers to ensure the con goes through without anyone suspecting they are being duped.

According to Kim, playing Pro Kwak left a bad taste in his mouth.

When asked what he enjoyed about playing the character, Kim said: "It is hard to feel good when you play a person like Pro Kwak.

"On the contrary, I felt anger towards the character and hated him while playing him.

"I hope that the audiences feel the same way as me – I want everyone to hate this guy and be glad when he's forced into a corner."

Kim has been acting since 2007, and has appeared in various films including *Forgotten, Illang: The Wolf Brigade*, *The Cop*, *The Devil* (opposite Ma Dong-seok), *Intruder* and *Space Sweepers*.

While Kim focuses more on films, one of his next projects is the TV drama *Grid* which is a Disney+ production headlined by Seo Kang-joon (*When The Weather Is Fine*) and written by Lee Soo-yeon (*Stranger*, *Life*).

Kim mentioned that it's exciting that the Korean content is getting global attention. Although on the set of *Grid*, he didn't notice much difference as the crew and cast members are all Korean, Kim said that it's great there are lots of different kinds of content being produced now in South Korea, and some of them are backed by non-Korean companies.

"I believe the Korean entertainment industry is well and ready to meet the world's expectations, where content is concerned," he stated.

Working too hard

By ZAI KAMAL
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NATALIE Tong's (pic) new year resolution should be taking care of her health more seriously as the actress revealed that her work schedule in 2021 was so hectic, it affected her immune system.

At a recent event to celebrate the completion of her new series, *The Invisible Team*, the 40-year-old Hong Kong actress explained that the lack of rest in the past year caused her immune system to be weak and because of that, she suffers from severe food allergies.

"There are 20 foods I cannot eat, such as rice, pork and cucumber. I was overworking to the point the doctor said I should take a half-year break," the TVB actress said, adding that her fans can look forward to four dramas from her this year.

Although Tong wasn't nominated in any category at this year's TVB Anniversary Award (which was handed out Jan 2), she isn't fazed.

She explained: "(In 2021) I only had one drama aired. My other dramas will be out in 2022 ... Hope everyone won't get tired [of watching] me."

Tong stars alongside Kenneth Ma, Joel Chan and Tiffany Lau in TVB's upcoming action thriller *The Invisible Team*.

The actress said she hit the gym five times a week to build up her strength to play a member of a counter-terrorism unit.

"It's nice to see some results after all that hard work. I used to be very weak, but now I have some muscle," she said, and then added, "Now that we're done filming, I don't really have the motivation to work out again."

Photo: Natalie Tong/Instagram

By JOHN LUI

Evolution in creativity

The Matrix trilogy's legacy lives on in today's films, says star Keanu Reeves.

In the new *Matrix* film, Thomas Anderson (Reeves, left) and Tiffany (Moss) are living separate lives. — Handout

WHEN science-fiction action movie *The Matrix* was released in 1999, its high-flying martial arts sequences were unlike anything audiences used to Hollywood films had seen.

Star Keanu Reeves, 57, says in an online interview that the movie helped end the idea that stars could fake the fight.

"The idea of training actors to do action was introduced by *The Matrix* and continues to this day," he says.

At that time, Hong Kong stars such as Michelle Yeoh, Jackie Chan and Jet Li were already doing their own action scenes, with many of them requiring wires that launched them up to ceilings and roofs.

The Wachowski siblings, who were fans of kung fu films and Japanese anime, brought into the project veteran Hong Kong fight choreographer Yuen Woo Ping (*Drunken Master*, 1978; *Fist Of Legend*, 1994).

Under the guidance of Yuen and his team, Reeves, Carrie-Anne Moss, Laurence Fishburne and Hugo Weaving took on gruelling sessions in fight training and wirework.

"That wire-work action had really been developed in the 1980s and became the Hong Kong style," notes Reeves.

The Canadian actor and Moss reprise their roles in the fourth movie of the Matrix franchise, *The Matrix Resurrections*, currently showing at cinemas nationwide.

Visual clarity

The Matrix Resurrections picks up two decades after the events in the third film, *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003).

Thomas Anderson (Reeves) and Tiffany (Moss) are living separate lives in the simulation known as The Matrix, their minds seemingly wiped clean of their Neo and Trinity personas and the war they fought against the Machines.

Members of the human resistance – among them, Morpheus (Yahya Abdul-Mateen, playing an alternate version of the leader played previously by Fishburne) – appear, urging Anderson to join their cause.

The Wachowskis also took from Hong Kong films the idea of visual clarity, so viewers see the fights uninterrupted by rapid-fire cuts or blurry camera work, Reeves says.

The American filmmakers also pioneered bullet-time photography, giving audiences a 3D-like view of the action in slow motion.

The film would become a global hit, with its crew rewarded with four Oscars for achievements in sound, editing, visual effects and cinematography. Yuen also worked on the second Matrix sequel – *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) – and *The Matrix Revolutions*, as well as on director Quentin Tarantino's two-part revenge saga *Kill Bill*, released in 2003 and 2004.

The legacy of the original Matrix trilogy lives on in today's action films, says Reeves. Chad Stahelski was Reeves' stunt double on the first Matrix film before adding stunt coordinator to his credits for the subsequent two films.

Stahelski, as co-director and director, would work with Reeves in three movies in the *John Wick* action-fantasy franchise (2014 to 2019), with a fourth coming in 2022.

"Chad says he went through the Wachowski film school," recalls the actor.

In between the last *Matrix* film and the new one, the Wachowskis worked on *Matrix*-related games and other media as well as science-fiction and fantasy projects, such as the movie *Cloud Atlas* (2012) and the *Sense8* television series (2015 to 2018).

Reviving the franchise

In an interview at the Berlin International Literature Festival last year, Lana Wachowski had said despite offers of large sums of money by the studio, she and sister Lilly resisted doing a fourth movie as they felt the trilogy had come to a conclusive end.

After the death of her parents in 2019, however, the 56-year-old said the grief she experienced made her turn inwards.

There, she found Neo and Trinity – the characters played by Reeves and Moss – who gave her comfort.

Fuelled by the need to see those she had loved in the past, she decided to make *Resurrections*, she had said.

In 2019, she told Reeves she was reviving the franchise.

Both had stayed in touch since *Revolutions* and she had never brought up the topic of another movie, he says.

"So, it was cool to get a message from her to say she was interested in making another *Matrix*. It was pretty thrilling," he shares.

In *Resurrections*, the idea of time and its effects on identity are felt by Neo and Trinity.

The passing of the years has made them doubt themselves and what they can remember, he notes.

"So much of the film is about the past and about memories – what's true and what's fiction. Lana's integrated those circumstances into the story," he adds.

The film comes with an unusually literary screenwriting team, as befits a franchise that has never been afraid to delve into abstract themes.

British novelist David Mitchell (who wrote the novel *Cloud Atlas* was based upon) and Bosnian-American writer Aleksandar Hemon, also a published author, wrote the screenplay with Lana Wachowski.

Reeves says the director loves to collaborate and speculates that working with two men from such creative literary backgrounds must have been a lively experience.

"I imagine them pasting stickers on a board – 'this goes here and that goes there'. The writing process must have been inspiring," he says.

Coming back to the set with the director who nearly two decades ago broke the rules of filmmaking was especially exciting, as she has made a "huge evolution in creativity" since then, he says.

From a creator who used to lean on artificial lighting, she now embraces natural light. She used to be more passive during filming, but is now a leader who aims to be "next to the camera, participating in the directing".

"She's such a sensitive director. She's insightful and has a vision. It's a good experience to be one of the paints on her brushes," he says. – The Straits Times/Asia News Network

In Fiennes form

By MICHAEL CHEANG
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FROM Harry Potter to James Bond, Ralph Fiennes has been in some of the biggest blockbuster franchises in history.

Heck, he has even voiced a minifigure in the Lego movie franchise.

The 59-year-old British thespian recently added another feather in his franchise cap with *The King's Man*, the prequel to the hugely successful *Kingsman* action comedy franchise.

Fiennes plays the Duke of Oxford, the founder of the Kingsman secret agency previously seen in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2014) and *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017).

The story traces the history of the secret agency, following the Duke and his son Conrad (Harris Dickinson) on a mission that sees them being involved in several events during World War I and coming up against an unknown adversary hellbent on destroying England.

Directed by Matthew Vaughn, the film also stars Gemma Arterton, Rhys Ifans, Matthew Goode, Tom Hollander, Daniel Brühl, Djimon Hounsou and Charles Dance.

The King's Man is Fiennes' fourth feature film released in 2021, having starred in critically acclaimed dramas *The Dig* and *The Forgiven*, on top of reprising his role as M in the latest James Bond movie, *No Time To Die*.

However, this may be his most fun and entertaining role yet, one that involves some creatively choreographed action sequences and lots of sword fighting, which Fiennes enjoyed very much.

"It was great! I've always loved stage fighting and I've always admired the great sword fights in films fromm the 1930s and 1940s starring Basil Rathbone or Errol Flynn. I loved Ridley Scott's *The Duellists*, and his recent film (*The Last Duel*) had a great sword fight at the end of it," he enthused during a recent virtual roundtable interview with Asian journalists.

"I do like a good sword fight. I've done some in (theatre productions) *Hamlet*, *Romeo And Juliet*, and *Richard III*, and I did a fencing film (*Sunshine* in 1999) with (Hungarian director) Istvan Szabo. So when this came along, I was quite excited."

Fiennes was also attracted to *The King's Man* because he believed in its entertainment and emotional value, as well as the comedic action element.

"*The King's Man* is a fun film. It's got humour, and it doesn't take itself too seriously. But I love all forms of film, whether they're comedy or satire or drama," he said, adding that good entertainment "takes us out of our lives, but also inspires us, teaches us or gives us a moral question".

Personally, he reckons that his job as an actor is to ensure he interprets the character as best as possible.

"I came to acting, because I love actors. I love watching actors in films. I believe in the value of how cinema can provoke us, move us, and can teach us about ourselves," he explained.

Fiennes stars as the founder of the Kingsman secret organisation in *The King's Man*. — Handout

"As a film viewer, I love being transported into someone's creation of a character. I love watching Daniel Day Lewis, who is so brilliant in so many roles. I love Vanessa Redgrave, Meryl Streep ... we love them because they transform and take us into the inner world of a character."

At the same time, however, Fiennes is not bothered by what critics or other people say about his films and performances.

"I'm as vulnerable as the next person. I like to read a good review, and I don't want to read a bad review. But there are always going to be people who don't like what you do or whom you disagree with," he said.

"I remember telling a teacher at my drama school, 'If I do this, maybe they won't like me', and he told me down. He said, 'There are always going to be people who don't like you, so for God's sake, grow up!'"

Fiennes concluded: "So, don't make choices only to satisfy other people's opinions. That's a mad path. Try to know what your beliefs are, and stick to the things that you know."

***The King's Man* is showing at cinemas nationwide.**

Embracing different looks and aesthetics, Yuna has a versatile style of dressing. — Yuna/Instagram

The turban hijab is one of her most identifiable fashion accessories. — Yuna/Instagram

A modest affair

Singer-songwriter Yuna's style has evolved over the years and is now effortlessly chic.

CELEBRITY STYLE

By BERVIN CHEONG
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IF there is one celebrity in Malaysia that has proven herself to be an enduring fashion icon, it is Yunalis Mat Zara'ui.

The singer-songwriter, who is known just as Yuna, has undergone a style journey of sorts. Her sense of dressing has evolved since she appeared on the scene in the 2000s.

While Yuna's outfits have matured over the years – going from vibrant and pretty to timelessly chic, it still remains as resolutely "her".

Of course, the turban hijab she wears will always be an integral part of her look. The 35-year-old has popularised the style to an international audience.

"Muslim girls, we love fashion! Whether we wear the hijab or not – it's our choice – and it's time the industry took note," Yuna told *The Guardian* back in 2017, when she was made the face of Uniqlo's first hijab line in the UK.

"I honestly don't know how it started, this hijabi fashion thing, but I'm glad it has. I like the style that I have, it's my identity."

In March last year, Yuna made it to the cover of *Vogue Singapore*. In the interview, she related how a record label executive once told her she had to remove her headscarf and render a sexy image to the world. She refused.

Fashion collaborations with numerous designers have solidified her influence in the industry. — Hatta Dolmat

True to form, she has managed to own her looks and made whatever she wore look good.

Yuna is seen in everything from cool jeans to flowy dresses, and she does not restrict her dressing. For her, experimenting is all good as long as it fits her modest style.

A global reach

Yuna has made waves all over the world. Her discography includes collaborations with Usher and Pharrell Williams. She performed as a special guest at the 2016 Soul Train Music Awards. She was even nominated for a BET Award in 2017.

And to think, this all started with the viral success of her music uploaded to social networking platform Myspace.

She has been recognised by the Malaysia Book Of Records for being the first Malaysian artiste to have an album charted on Billboard Top 10. Awards she has received are just too numerous to list down.

Yuna is also a law graduate. Born in Kedah, she grew up in Subang Jaya, Selangor, before eventually heading to the United States for a short stint when her career in entertainment took off.

In 2016, *Rolling Stone* named her album as one of the best R&B albums of 2016, alongside other big artistes like Beyonce.

"Yuna's *Chapters*, which boasts cameos from Usher and Jhene Aiko, demonstrates that the Malaysian pop star is an insightful lyricist who only needs a stellar single or two to earn mainstream attention," the magazine wrote.

Fast-forward to 2022, Yuna's fame and influence is shining as brightly as ever.

Spotify currently shows that she has 1.4 million listeners. Her Instagram account, where she regularly shares about her life and fashion sense, sports over 900,000 followers.

Taking over the fashion world

Not just content with setting fashion trends, Yuna is making her mark in the style industry with various collaborations as well.

She has partnered with Malaysian designer Hatta Dolmat in the past for a collection that comprises pretty pieces like kimono cardigans, loose tops and palazzo pants.

Her friendship with Hatta is definitely a close one. When she got married in 2018, she wore his designs.

When Hatta released a sustainable fashion collection, Yuna was featured in the campaign and web series leading up to the 2020 Kuala Lumpur Fashion Week.

She has won recognition from various global fashion publications for how she manages to stay true to her personal style. — Yuna/Instagram

She is recognised as a poster girl for modest dressing. — Yuna/Instagram

She described his designs fashioned from recycled plastic bottles as "amazing".

Yuna has also worked with Malaysian demi-fine jewellery Kin that same year to come up with limited edition hoop earrings. Like her turban hijabs, these are seen as quintessentially Yuna and are part of her iconic look.

In 2019, she partnered shoe designer Christy Ng to release a collection of shoes and handbags.

Such collaborations underscore her love for fashion. It shows that she views dressing up as not just part of her career in entertainment, but an important and very personal passion.

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Shiwei Ooi
Undergraduate student
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Luxury elevated

Mercedes-Benz's flagship model arrives looking more elegant as well as getting extra safety and premium features.

MERCEDES-BENZ Malaysia has launched the all-new S 580 e (W223) flagship luxury sedan that features higher levels of comfort, safety and innovation.

However, the price of the locally-assembled S 580 e plug-in hybrid is still pending government approval and would cost more than the outgoing S 560 e (W222) which is priced at RM647,000.

The company is expected to obtain the official pricing soon and planning to start deliveries from the middle of this month.

While being bigger and having a longer wheelbase compared with the previous S-Class model, the new S 580 e gets the classic saloon proportions with short front overhang, long wheelbase and balanced rear overhang.

The vehicle is also muscular-looking with its wide track and flush-mounted wheels.

Its contoured surfaces with sculptured looks create special light effects, while the radiator grille, LED headlights and bonnet project a strong presence.

At the rear, the slim-cut LED lights and a long chrome bar inject a new level of elegance.

The S 580 e is one of the world's most aerodynamic cars, and especially so in the luxury sedan segment, with a Cd figure from 0.22.

Its luxurious interior ambience with lounge character is marked by elegance and high quality, while the dashboard gets a new architecture with modern surface design and ergonomic display arrangement.

Meanwhile, the seats in nappa leather upholstery are inviting and feature a flowing, three-dimensional layer design theme.

The adjustment range and angle of the front passenger seat in the chauffeur configuration and the reclining seat behind it have been improved as well.

The S 580 e also features the world's first rear airbags, which are integrated into the backrests of the front seats and deploy in a severe front impact.

In addition, digital innovations such the second generation learn-capable MBUX (Mercedes-Benz User Experience) increases driving enjoyment while making driving even safer, paving a further step towards autonomous driving.

The integration into MBUX means that the level of visualisation has now entered a whole new dimension.

With a more digital and intelligent interior, the S 580 e features up to five large screens, in part with OLED technology, to make the control of vehicle and comfort functions easier.

Among them are the 12.8-inch OLED centre display and the 12.3-inch 3D digital instrument panel.

The system now features fingerprint scanner just below the central display to unlock access.

Also available is the MBUX Augmented Reality Navigation which connects the virtual world with the real world.

The technology incorporates graphical navigation instructions and traffic information into live images to ensure drivers will arrive safely and stress-free.

The voice assistant "Hey Mercedes" is constantly learning, by activation of online services in the Mercedes me App.

The voice assistant can also be controlled from the rear.

The new model is even quieter with a highly rigid body shell that offers outstanding noise control and vibration comfort.

The apertures for the cable grommets in the firewall have double seals, while acoustic foam in certain body shell sections are used for the first time.

The firewall insulation has also been extended into the side areas of the A-pillars and the floor area to achieve an engine sound that is perceived as refined and unobtrusive in the interior.

The new aluminum hybrid body shell with an aluminum content exceeding 50% also improved crash safety, lower weight and provide outstanding handling characteristics.

Meanwhile, its Digital Light headlamps each feature a light module consisting three powerful LEDs with light that is refracted and directed by 1.3 million micro-mirrors to produce a resolution more than 2.6 million pixels per vehicle.

Powering the S 580 e is 3.0-litre inline-6 turbocharged engine delivering 367hp and 500Nm of torque mated to a 9G-Tronic transmission.

The electric motor, meanwhile, produces 110kW and 440Nm of torque and allows 100km of all-electric driving range.

A 0-100kph sprint can be achieved in 5.2 seconds with a top speed of 250kph.

Suspension is Airmatic that delivers a smooth and premium ride.

The S 580 e also uses some 98kg of components made from resource-conserving materials and 40kg more are made from renewable raw materials.

Its floor coverings are made from Econyl recycled nylon thread.

Rear LED lights are slim and carry a triangular styling.

The dashboard has a large centre infotainment display.

High-end Palisade debuts

Palisade starts from RM328,888.

HYUNDAI-SIME Darby Motor wrapped up its model launch for 2021 with the official debut of the full-size Palisade SUV last month.

The fully imported model comes in four variants comprising two petrol and two diesel versions, available in either 7-seat or 8-seat configuration.

The petrol variants are being marketed as the more premium.

Both petrol variants use a 3.8-litre V6 engine that produces 291hp and 355Nm of torque, while the diesel variants get a 2.2-litre turbo diesel mill making 197hp and 440Nm of torque.

The four variants are: EXEC 7 at RM348,888 and EXEC 8 at RM328,888 (diesel engine variants); and LUXE 7 at RM358,888 and LUXE 8 RM338,888 (petrol engine variants).

With third-row seats folded, the Palisade offers a generous 1,297-litres of cargo space.

For added spaciousness, rear seat passengers can enjoy a dual-wide sunroof.

The Palisade is equipped with Hyundai's SmartSense, an Advanced Driver Assistance System.

A series of smart safety features include Forward Collision-Avoidance Assist, Blind-Spot Collision-Avoidance Assist, Lane Keeping Assist, and Rear Cross-Traffic Collision-Avoidance Assist, and Safe Exit Alert, among others.

Other features are its six-airbag system, three-zone independent control fully automatic air conditioning, Blind-Spot View Monitor, Head-Up Display and adjustable Smart Power Tailgate to suit preferred height.

Black-monotone and navy colour packages are offered for the interior with the options of black leather, and burgundy or warm grey Nappa leather.

The Palisade is now available for viewing at the Hyundai Ara Damansara dealership at Sime Darby Motors City here as well as those at Hyundai Old Klang Road, Kuala Lumpur; Gurney Paragon, George Town, Penang; and Skudai, Johor Baru.

More appealing than ever

The Subaru XV line-up has been updated and the EyeSight advanced driver assist technology is among its enhancements.

THE Subaru XV and XV GT Edition are now offered with new updates that include styling, safety and convenience enhancements.

The sports utility vehicle line-up comes in Premium trim level and features the 2.0-litre direct injection boxer engine with 156PS and 196Nm of torque, and the EyeSight advanced driver assist technology.

The XV starts from RM139,788, while the XV GT Edition costs more at RM146,788 in Peninsular Malaysia.

The new XV GT edition is the second XV GT model to be enhanced with a sportier look created by Giken Co Ltd and Masahiko "Jack" Kobayashi.

The bodykit is even more aggressive looking and features redesigned front under spoiler with more garnishes for the front bumper.

Also exclusive for XV GT Edition are sporty 17-inch wheels and leather seats.

Meanwhile, the EyeSight system uses a pair of stereo cameras to detect and recognise pedestrians and vehicles to make driving safer and enjoyable.

EyeSight's key features are Pre-Collision braking, Pre-Collision Throttle Management, Adaptive Cruise Control, Lead Vehicle Start Alert, Lane Departure Warning and Lane Sway Warning.

Aside from a suspension system retuned for smoother rides, the refreshed SUV also gets Subaru's SI-Drive and Dual-Function X-Mode to enhance driving dynamics.

In addition, the new model also comes refreshed 17-inch alloy wheels, and new front bumper and grille.

Other features include eight-way power adjustable with memory driver's seat, auto vehicle hold, reverse auto tilt-down mirrors, and Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity.

(Above) The XV GT Edition has leather seats.

Making a fresh entry

CHINA-BASED car maker Guangzhou Automobile Group has launched its first model in Malaysia - the GAC GS3 compact sports utility vehicle.

Distributed by WTC Automotif (M) Sdn Bhd (WTCA), a fully-owned subsidiary of Warisan TC Motor Holdings Bhd, the fully-imported GS3 is available in Standard variant priced from RM88,800 (private registration, on-the-road without insurance but with 50% SST reduction) and Premium from RM96,800.

Following the signing of the distributorship agreement between WTCA and GAC Motor International Limited on Nov 30, WTCA is currently working to kick-start the local assembly of the GS3 and other upcoming GAC models.

The GS3 comes with a Flying Dynamic Wing 3.0 front design featuring subtle chrome strips on the grille while the projector headlamps, fog lights with lower bumper cladding combination emphasises the vehicle's width.

The interior gets a 'floating' horizontal dashboard design, a large centre 8-inch infotainment touchscreen with switches and controls for the climate control located underneath.

The GS3 also has a sporty 3-spoke multifunction steering wheel wrapped in leatherette and equipped with controls for multimedia and voice calls.

Its cargo space of 356 litres can be expanded by folding down the 60:40 spilt rear seats.

Powering the GS3 is a 1.5-litre engine with Dual-CVVT and a GAC patented combustion control technology for enhanced efficiency.

The four-cylinder engine produces 114PS and 150Nm of torque and is mated to an Aisin six-speed automatic transmission with adaptive intelligent control for a fuel efficiency of 6.9 litres per 100km based on the combined NEDC cycle.

Other features include six airbags, Blind Spot Detection, Electronic Stability Control, Emergency Stop Signal, Rear View Camera, Seatbelt Warning for all passengers, ISOFIX child seat mounts and a Climate Control System with PM2.5 filtering for odour-free interior air.

Bookings, test drives and static viewing of the GS3 are available at the new and dedicated GAC showroom at Lot 72, Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah, Kuala Lumpur.

The GS3 comes with plenty of features.

Vantage The Hunter edition.

Gaining an ad-Vantage

ASTON Martin Kuala Lumpur has introduced an Aston Martin Vantage customised unit – The Hunter edition.

Named after the characteristics of a hunter – aggressive, intelligent and assertive – The Hunter edition is priced from RM880,000 (excluding duties and taxes) with five years warranty and servicing plan.

Meanwhile, the regular Vantage is available from a base price of RM678,000.

The Hunter edition gets the choice of the exterior paint colour and options inspired by the vibe of the hunter.

Grey symbolises intelligence while the darker finish on the front grille and other exterior options (bonnet vents, mirror caps, roof panel, window surround finisher, rear diffuser Insert and blades) raises the aggressive appearance and creates a stealthier look.

In fact, this is the first Vantage with China Grey in Malaysia.

This customisation unit features the new 21-inch wheels design in Satin Black to complete the sporting luxury appearance.

The Hunter edition also gets the latest features such as vanned front grille and bonnet vents, which can be found on Aston Martin Vantage F1® Edition.

The duotone environment, the mix of Onyx Black and Chancellor Red, suggests an exciting pleasure of driving related to the heritage of sports cars.

Adding an emotive twist, the interior jewellery package – Dark Satin Chrome finish visually removes the highlights to create a darker jewelled ambiance to Vantage's interior environment.

SP Grade engine oil debuts

HONDA Malaysia has introduced a new engine oil quality of SP Grade that offers greater engine protection for Honda car owners.

The new grade engine oil enables Honda engines to provide stable performance and better fuel economy while prolonging their lifespan.

Available viscosity range are SP 10W-30 Mineral, SP 5W-30 Semi-Synthetic and SP 0W-20 Fully-Synthetic.

The SP Grade engine oil will replace the existing SN Grade range except for the SN 0W-30 Fully-Synthetic which will still be available for cars with high performance engines such as the Civic Type R.

Suitable for most petrol and turbocharged engines, the SP Grade engine oil is recommended by Honda Research & Development and formulated to meet all requirements of Honda engines and latest standards issued by the American Petroleum Institute.

The SP Grade engine oil also minimises timing chain elongation and improves high temperature deposit protection for pistons and turbochargers.

The new range also provides better sludge and varnish control, valve train and intake lifter wear protection, higher oxidation stability as well as emission control system protection.

Honda's range of engine oil delivers maximum benefits and protection.

Myvi AV is the top variant.

The rear spoiler adds to the Myvi's sporty looks.

The AV variant comes with red highlights for the interior.

The 1.5-litre delivers 103hp and 137Nm of torque.

The rear still has good legroom.

The boot capacity is 277 litres.

The little car that delivers

The latest Perodua Myvi steps up its game with a raft of features that will keep it at the head of the pack.

By LEE PANG SENG

IT'S NOT easy living up to expectations as the top selling car in Malaysia especially when any changes made with subsequent model upgrades are critically viewed and appraised.

And the latest evolution of the Myvi, which is in its third-generation status, sees a very significant change in going Dual Mode CVT (Continuously Variable Transmission) from the previous model's four-speed automatic.

While the Myvi might share a 1.5-litre engine similar to that in the Toyota Vios and Yuris, the D-CVT is said to be developed by Daihatsu to befit the driving needs expected of the Myvi.

The D-CVT is described as a compact and lightweight transmission that was designed to enhance transmission efficiency further, provide 'powerful and smooth' acceleration at low speeds with quieter performance and increase fuel efficiency (meaning better mileage).

In Perodua's reckoning, the Myvi with D-CVT should return a 5% improvement in fuel economy (or an additional 1km) for every litre of petrol and 20% better acceleration.

In addition, the latest Myvi variant is equipped with a full suite of safety features that qualifies it to be a car with Autonomous Level 2 technology.

This is the Perodua Smart Drive Assist (PSDA) that has four features – Advanced Safety Assist (ASA), Driving Assist, Parking Assist and Head Lamp Assist.

A further breakdown of what each safety system comprises reveals that only the top AV variant has the full line-up of what's available and this is pared somewhat for the other versions down the line.

Still, the entire model spectrum (except for the 1.3 model without PSDA) remains well equipped with safety features, both active and passive.

This includes the full ASA package of Pre-Collision Warning, Pre-Collision Braking, Pedal Misoperation Control and Front Departure Alert, along with the Lane Departure Warning and Prevention features and Auto High Beam.

The Myvi 1.5 AV earns its flagship status with such Driving Assist features as Adaptive Cruise Control, Lane Keep Control and Blind Spot Monitor as well as Parking Assist items in the Rear Cross Traffic Alert and Reverse Camera.

Body styling saw minimal changes between old and new, and the most obvious one that immediately stands it apart from the previous edition are the vertical daytime running lights in front and vertical strips on the rear bumpers.

Perodua obviously saw the need for the latest Myvi to be driven to fully gauge its newly minted status and organised a media drive from Putrajaya to Johor Baru and back.

We had our hands-on experience with the top model Myvi AV and came away convinced that the Myvi has retained its hot pace despite a change of transmission and the addition of 'assisted driving' conveniences.

While previous CVTs have this deep transmission roar on kick-downs, improved electronic control of the operation has reduced that significantly and this was noted in the Myvi AV.

We could make direct comparisons somewhat to the Alza that we used to own and felt that the transmission roar between the four-speed automatic and D-CVT was similar; maybe a tad louder in the latter.

Of course, we could do without that by selecting the gearshift to S for Sport or press the PWR (for power) button on the steering wheel.

Doing so had the electronic control 'shifting' the D-CVT to a lower 'gear' to tap on the engine's power or torque curve for stronger moving acceleration.

The pick-up in speed on the move was generally good and we could make reasonably quick passes on the highways, supported by the good engine output of 103hp and 137Nm of torque.

Driving along at constant high speeds was pretty easy to do without pushing the engine hard and it was even easier on the engine at a lower 110-120kph; engine speed for the latter was quite similar to what we were used to in our Alza at 2,200-2,300rpm.

Starting out with a full tank, we almost made it to Johor Baru after taking a detour to Batu Pahat for a *nasi briani* lunch.

We were pretty close to empty by the time we arrived in Kulai as what was left in the 36-litre fuel tank could provide us a mileage of about 50km; we decided to fill up at this point to slightly more than RM60 worth.

After covering at least 50km in JB for meals and photo shoots over two days, we made it back to Putrajaya on less than RM100 of fuel all in; pretty good considering the lively driving we were doing.

Road roar was a constant note on highway drives and wind noise, mostly around the door mirrors and roof area, became obvious from 120kph onwards.

The steering wheel system is electronically assisted and it stiffened up as we hit highway speeds, giving it a weighted feeling that took some getting used to.

And like all lane departure warning systems, there would be beeps if we changed lanes without using the indicators.

In urban driving, the steering feel was a lot lighter in operation, which is how it should be for easy parking manoeuvres and less demanding arm-work.

The seats generally have short squabs that did not provide ample thigh support but we made the long distance runs without suffering any discomfort.

Likewise, the front seatrests might be a bit lower than expected but back support was generally good as we didn't feel any ache in that area as well.

A brief spell as a rear seat passenger allowed us to enjoy the good legroom, thanks in part to the short seat squab.

Luggage space is ample at 277 litres and if you want more, the 60:40 folding rear seatrests could be folded away according to the additional space required.

The Myvi AV is the only one with leather seats albeit with rather bold red styling that is more for flash than upmarket appeal.

For its flagship status, it commands a top price at RM58,800 on the road without insurance and sales tax.

With more than 14,700 orders received for the new Myvi at the time of the Putrajaya-Johor Baru drive, Perodua says the waiting list averages four months.

It's definitely worth the wait if you want a compact car that is comfortable and delivers reasonably quick driving on the highway without burning up too much fuel.

(From left) E 63 S, GLE 450 and GLC 43 Coupe at The Banjaran Hotsprings Retreat, Ipoh.

Ipoh escapade

Mercedes-Benz Malaysia has luxury models in its line-up that should meet your criteria for classy looks or sporting pedigree.

By HONG BOON HOW
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WITH the recent reopening of interstate travel, Mercedes-Benz Malaysia held a drive from Petaling Jaya to Ipoh and back for the media to reacquaint themselves with the German brand's line-up in Malaysia.

They were the Mercedes-Benz range with a slant towards presence and elegance, and the Mercedes-AMG horde that overflows with heaps of power and motorsports-derived driving dynamics.

Here is the quick overview of some cars in the troupe that came in sedan, sports utility vehicle (SUV) and hatchback bodystyles.

E 200 Avantgarde and E 300 AMG Line

As the latest arrival to the Mercedes-Benz Malaysia family at the time of the drive, the locally assembled face-lifted E-Class sedan gets a revised front that now features redesigned LED head and tail lights, a more expressive hood, sleeker-looking grille, new steering wheel and new alloy wheels among others.

Aside from having the latest generation of the MBUX (Mercedes-Benz User Experience) multimedia system that supports Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, the new Widescreen Cockpit that includes two 12.3-inch displays, has higher resolution and is easier to read.

The much sought-after executive sedan is available in the E 200 Avantgarde and E 300 AMG Line variants, priced on-the-road without insurance and with SST exemption at RM327,850 and RM376,717 respectively.

Inside, the E 200 is spacious and plush, featuring Artico man-made leather upholstery with longitudinal-grain aluminium trimming and open-pore ash wood inserts at the centre console.

Powering the E 200 is 2.0-litre turbocharged engine delivering 197hp and 320Nm of torque, mated to a nine-speed 9G-Tronic transmission, for a 0-100kph dash of 7.4 seconds and a top speed of 240kph.

Meanwhile, the E 300's 2.0-litre turbocharged block pumps out more *oomph* at 258hp and 370Nm of torque.

Transmission is also the nine-speed 9G-Tronic but the 0-100kph acceleration time has been reduced to 6.2 seconds and maximum speed increased to 250kph.

While both variants feature the Agility Control suspension for sharp handling, the E 300 returns a firmer ride due to the one-size larger 19-inch wheels and to cope with the increased engine power output in comparison with the E 200.

Inside, the E 300's trimming is open-pore black ash wood with leather upholstery, while the LED headlights are the Multibeam type that feature Ultra Range high beam.

Overall safety features of the E-Class include Blind Spot Assist and Active Brake Assist, while the E 300 gets additional Active Distance Assist Distronic and Active Lane Assist among others.

GLE 450 AMG Line

Featuring a "diamond" grille with all-round aprons and large 21-inch AMG multi-spoke alloy wheels, the Mercedes-Benz GLE 450 4Matic AMG Line conjures up a distinguished and yet sporty appearance.

For a luxury full-size sports utility vehicle with three seating rows, the GLE is spacious and gets a 3.0-litre turbocharged six-cylinder engine that delivers 367hp and 500Nm of torque to push the heft around.

Transmission is the nine-speed 9G-Tronic with an all-wheel drive system to pin the power onto the road for a 0-100kph sprint in 5.7 seconds and a top speed of 250kph.

The Airmatic air suspension system, while ensuring a comfortable ride on rough terrain, can also be set to be firmer at high speed cruising.

The upholstery in Artico and Dinamica mircofibre combination along with anthracite open-pore oak wood elements round up the opulent interior of the locally-assembled GLE 450 that is priced at RM475,501.

Other premium equipment include the Widescreen Cockpit display, MBUX, Burmester Surround Sound System. LED Multibeam headlights and class-leading safety features such as 360-degree camera view, Blind Spot Assist, Active Lane Keeping Assist, Lane Tracking package and Active Distance Assist Distronic.

AMG E 63 S 4Matic+

Easily the "baddest" boy of the drive, the Mercedes-AMG E 63 S 4Matic+ is a brute force machine that rewards adventurous drivers with explosive acceleration, exhilarating exhaust soundtrack and dynamic handling.

Under the bonnet of this high-performance sedan is a 4.0-litre V8 bi-turbo engine that cranks out a whopping 612hp and 850Nm of torque for a 0-100kph sprint in just 3.4 seconds and a top speed of 300kph.

The engine also came with a cylinder deactivation feature that allows four cylinders to be shut down during leisurely drives to increase fuel efficiency when outright performance is not needed.

Its nine-speed AMG Speedshift MCT gearbox features a lighter wet multi-plate start-off clutch that is more responsive and delivers every bit of grunt onto all four 20-inch wheels.

As the E 63 S is a full-fledged creation of AMG Motorsports tuning division, expect the ride quality to be much firmer compared with comfort-biased suspension settings of typical Mercedes-Benz models.

At high speeds and fast corners, the E 63 S stays planted on the road and this easily increases the driver's confidence and driving enjoyment.

The AMG Performance Seat package ensures the driver and the front passenger are well-tucked in during high speed manoeuvers.

AMG carbon-fibre trimming for the interior and exterior is standard along with nappa leather upholstery, red seatbelts, Widescreen Cockpit display, MBUX and Burmester Surround Sound System.

At RM1.12mil, the E 63 S also gets AMG high performance compound brake system, AMG Performance exhaust system, AMG Driver's package and Multibeam LED headlights.

AMG GLC 43 4Matic Coupe

Getting a coupe-like rear, the Mercedes-AMG GLC 43 4Matic Coupe certainly cuts a prettier and more pleasing appearance compared with a typical two-box SUV design.

With a 3.0-litre V6 bi-turbo engine under the bonnet that pushes out 390hp and 520Nm of torque coupled to a nine-speed AMG Speedshift TCT 9G transmission, the GLC 43 Coupe can complete the 0 to 100kph dash in 4.9 seconds and reach a top speed of 250kph.

While not as spacious as the GLE 450, the GLC 43 Coupe is still roomy inside and gets tastefully trimmed with open-pore black ash wood and Artico-Dinamica combination upholstery.

The large AMG grille with vertical slats takes prominence along with restyled Multibeam LED headlights with daytime running lights, aluminium-look running boards with rubber studs and 21-inch wheels.

Priced at RM508,597, other features of the GLC 43 Coupe include AMG Ride Control+ system, driving assistance package, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto support, Burmester Surround Sound System and hands-free operation tailgate.

AMG A 35 4Matic Edition 1

Said to be among the cheapest entry into the world of Mercedes-AMG high-performance vehicles, the A 35 oozes with unrestrained driving thrills in a compact package.

Its hatchback styling with short wheelbase might sacrifice some interior space but increases the A 35's cornering prowess and fun-to-drive factor.

A 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbocharged engine serves up a generous dose of 306hp and 400Nm of torque and is mated to a seven-speed AMG Speedshift 7G dual clutch transmission with an all-wheel drive system.

Though the engine is not the most powerful compared with other AMG models, the A 35's higher power to weight ratio allows it to scorch the 0-100kph sprint in 4.7 seconds.

Its hunkered appearance with large 19-inch wheels, front splitter and aggressive-looking rear spoiler lend credence to its athletic capabilities.

Inside, there is the Widescreen Cockpit with MBUX as well as a flat-bottom AMG Performance steering wheel, AMG Performance Seats and plenty of Artico-Dinamica upholstery.

Coming in at RM366,785, other goodies include AMG Ride Control suspension, Multibeam LED headlights, Active Brake Assist, Active Lane Keeping Assist and Blind Spot Assist.

The E 300 AMG Line gets a punchy engine and luxurious appointments.

The A 35 is compact but fun to drive.

StarSpecial
EDUCATION GUIDE
THE STAR, THURSDAY 6 JANUARY 2022

The Diploma in Medical Laboratory Technology offered by MSU College is designed for students interested in scientific discoveries and medical research.

Grooming future frontliners

THE emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the vital role of medical laboratory technologists who are in charge of conducting the real-time polymerase chain reaction tests (RT-PCR) on suspected Covid-19 samples.

They are the unsung heroes behind the scene.

Though we can't see them in the front lines, they have made enormous contributions in the fight against this deadly disease.

MSU College offers the Diploma in Medical Laboratory Technology (MLT) to those who are interested in scientific discoveries and medical research.

It prepares students with well-balanced programmes comprising academic knowledge with hands-on practical skills which will enhance student's knowledge and skills.

The programme is a comprehensive training and learning experience in all levels of laboratory medicine, including Hematology, Microbiology and so on.

Students are trained to conduct procedures and tests on specimens from patients such as blood, urine and tissue, and provide reports that help doctors decide on diagnosis and patient treatment.

The three-year programme aims to produce medical laboratory technologists who are competent, skilful and capable to meet the human capital needs of the country, with career opportunities in numerous industries such as hospitals, clinics, public health laboratories, pharmaceutical or chemical industries, biotechnology companies, veterinary clinics, research laboratories, transplant and blood donor centres and fertility clinics.

At MSU College, students will be exposed to a holistic learning experience, to build soft skills and all the necessary skills that are required for a professional MLT.

The curriculum combines the knowledge of integrated education, health and education science labs.

Upon completion of the diploma, students may proceed to a bachelor's degree programme at Management and Science University (MSU) through the Faculty of Health & Life Sciences (FHLS) or International Medical School (IMS).

Another opportunity for students is the progression to the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) programme offered through IMS either in the Shah Alam campus or in MSU offshore campus in Bangalore, India.

■ For more details, look out for the advertisement in this *StarSpecial*.

Upskilling for success in university and the marketplace

IB DP students are internationally minded inquirers, thinkers, risk-takers, and communicators.

THE International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IB DP) is renowned globally as the most highly esteemed pre-university programme for students aged 16 to 19. It is also the only curriculum offering the skills students need for the 21st century.

The International School of Penang (Uplands) is proud to be the only school providing this prestigious programme in all of Penang.

The value of the IB DP was confirmed yet again at the World Economic Forum 2020 (WEF).

How do we upskill a billion people by 2030? This question was a focus at the WEF in 2020.

According to WEF 2020, soft skills – leadership, adaptability, how to translate feedback into measurable change – are what make short-term skills training more long-lasting and transformative.

People are looking to leaders to provide a trusted path forward. They need to learn how to lead in fast-changing times, empower people and create a culture of lifelong learning where entrepreneurship will thrive.

Enter the IB DP, the only pre-university programme specifically designed to create the leaders the WEF envisions, with collaboration, innovation, and resilience at its centre and integrated throughout.

First, the Learner Profile is at the centre of the IB DP. Students are internationally minded inquirers, thinkers, risk-takers, and communicators. These attributes of the Learner Profile are synonymous with the "soft skills" the WEF discussed and central to the development of every student in the IB DP.

The IB DP Core is the most unique aspect of the programme, and the one which universities say adds the most value to IB students in their undergraduate studies.

Comprising three components, the Core broadens students' experience and challenges them to apply their knowledge and skills.

In Theory of Knowledge, students explore how we know what we claim to know.

The Extended Essay is an independent research project, finishing with a 4,000-word paper. In Creativity, Activity, Service, students undertake experiences and a project in those three strands.

Finally, the IB subjects are organised and taught to encourage investigation, synthesis, and personal engagement. Memorisation and formulas play little role in the advanced coursework students undertake.

IB DP students find themselves well ahead of their peers in their first year of university thanks to the depth and breadth of their preparation in six subjects.

"The IB is a 4.0 education in a 1.0 world," says Dr Siva Kumari, the IB's seventh director-general.

"The IB prepares the students to be the creators of the algorithm rather than the consumers of the algorithm."

Do you want to be ready for the dynamic world of the future, poised for success in the global marketplace?

The IB Diploma Programme Scholarship at Uplands will provide up to six students the opportunity to gain these key skills and ensure entrance to their universities of choice. The scholarship application is open now for August 2022 intake.

■ For more information, visit *https://www.uplands.org/scholarships/*

The road best travelled

AFTER completing Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), your tertiary education direction will become your next big decision.

The Diploma and Foundation routes are the two most common entry choices into higher education at Tunku Abdul Rahman University College (TAR UC) towards furthering studies in over 200 programmes spanning a wide range of disciplines.

The typical progression will be to undertake a Foundation (one year) or Diploma (two to two and a half years) before transitioning to a Degree programme (three to four years).

On paper, the Foundation seems to have a swifter progression, but Diploma students at TAR UC are eligible for credit transfer up to Year 2 in the relevant Degree programme.

For Tan Yong Xin and Low Tiong Liea, their decisions are based on what is more comfortable and can cater to their individual needs and personal growth.

Like most post-SPM students, Tan was undecided which tertiary education path to take.

The 22-year-old decided to continue with the Foundation in Science at TAR UC, which led him to the Bachelor of Electrical and Electronics Engineering (Hons) programme.

"Despite the general structure of the Foundation programme, it gave me a solid foundation with extensive basic knowledge and understanding for a seamless transition to Degree level. Plus, the academic staff is always happy to guide us," said Tan.

Low, who is also a Bachelor of Electrical and Electronics Engineering (Hons) student, enrolled in the Diploma of Electronic Engineering programme.

"The knowledge I gained from Diploma acted as a solid base to keep up academically even at Degree level.

"This is also thanks to my lecturers in ensuring no student was left behind academically and their extra effort in making sure we understood the topics. In addition, the credit transfer to Year 2 of the bachelor's degree programme helped me save one year of studies," said Low.

Both Tan and Low agree that TAR UC offers more than just academic qualifications, they insist that their experience so far has many added advantages and values that are "Beyond Education".

"Not only did I gain academic knowledge and potentially a path to a brighter future, I also learned how to make better decisions, self-confidence, and made more friends," Tan shared.

Low added, "TAR UC has exceeded my expectations with its vast and comfortable campus environment. I appreciate the opportunities to participate in events which helped me connect with more peers, develop soft skills, and enhance my personal values and identity – all aspects outside the field of my studies I never thought I would experience during my higher education journey."

Although Tan (left) and Low (right) chose different paths when enrolling with TAR UC, their decision to pick the Foundation and Diploma routes respectively was based on individual needs that ended up benefiting their personal growth.

■ To find out more about TAR UC's range of Foundation or Diploma programmes for the January and February intake, visit TAR UC's physical Open Day at all campuses nationwide from Jan 7 to 9, 10am to 5pm.

Alternatively, find out more information by visiting *www.tarc.edu.my*

Prospective students are also encouraged to apply online at *www.tarc.edu.my*

Attractive scholarships are available on the basis of academic merit and sibling discount for qualified students.

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E&O Hotel, Penang

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KSL Hotel, Johor Bharu

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Enticing prospects in healthcare sector

THE needs and demand for digital health are growing exponentially, especially in the face of the ongoing global pandemic.

A career in digital health involves working in a discipline that includes digital care programmes, technologies with health and society to enhance the efficient delivery of healthcare and making medicine more precise and personalised using information and communication technologies to facilitate understanding of health problems and challenges of patients.

A professional in digital health works with patient records and data in a healthcare setting and is often employed by healthcare providers such as clinics and hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, commercial insurance companies, medical device manufacturers and governmental or other policy-focused institutions. A digital health professional can also work in project management, analytical, consulting or support capacities, depending on an organisation's needs.

The main contribution of digital health lies with three main areas of interest – patient-centric, diagnostics-centric and research and development-centric.

Those interested in this career will need a basic degree in Digital Health.

With this in mind, the International Medical University (IMU) will be starting a new programme in 2022 – the Bachelor in Digital Health (Honours) which blends Computing, Data Analytics and Health Sciences. It will make graduates more knowledgeable about healthcare organisations, systems and regulations, and needs and problems.

The Digital Health programme at IMU is the first undergraduate programme in Malaysia and South-East Asia that focuses on digital health. It aims to equip students with an in-depth understanding and know-how of the healthcare field, particularly digital health.

The curriculum provides students the necessary skills and knowledge to meet industry needs. The programme is embedded with research-led teaching and an up-to-date structure to meet the ever-changing needs of the IT and healthcare industries.

In addition, students have the opportunity to work in a digital health-related company or hospital in their final semester for about 20 weeks as part of industrial training.

"Leveraging on the university teaching staff diversity – including computer science and informatics, biomedical, clinical and health sciences – alongside that of external industrial partners, the Digital Health programme will deliver training across the breadth of computing-related to digital health application such as programming, application development, data analytics including machine learning, artificial intelligence, and digital healthcare ecosystem," said Dr Tan Ee Xion, IMU senior lecturer and programme director of the Digital Health programme.

This three-year programme opens for the first intake in July and September. Those who join in July will start the general studies (MPU) modules followed by the first semester of the Digital Health programme.

The programme is open to students from any discipline with the required pre-university qualifications together with a credit in Mathematics at SPM level or equivalent. It is also open to diploma holders in any discipline, subject to a rigorous internal assessment process.

After the three-year Digital Health undergraduate programme, students can progress to the Master in Health Informatics and Analytics – a one-year full-time Master programme, which provides the perfect pathway for Digital Health undergraduates who intend to pursue health informatics and analytics.

The students will be more focused on linking and analysing large complex datasets, using techniques that transform medical research and create exciting new commercial opportunities in the healthcare sector.

The commencement of this programme is in July and September each year. If you are interested, make an online application via *www.imu.edu.my*

If you have just completed your SPM and do not have pre-university qualification, the one-year IMU Foundation in Science (FiS) is the direct route into any of the university's degree programmes.

■ For more information, refer to *www.imu.edu.my* or email start@imu.edu.my or call IMU at 03-2731 7272.

The needs and demand for digital health are growing exponentially, especially in the face of the ongoing global pandemic.

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Study at a top university in London

KING'S College London is one of the top 10 UK universities in the world and ranked sixth in the UK for the quality and quantity of research activity (2022 QS World University Rankings). As London's most central university, King's has over 33,000 students, 40,000 alumni from over 185 countries including 12 Nobel Prize winners and some 8,500 staff.

King's has four campuses by the River Thames between Westminster and the City of London plus one more in south London. The central location allows students to take full advantage of having a front row seat in one of the world's most connected and dynamic cities. King's has nine faculties, schools and institutes making it one of the largest multi-faculty institutions in the UK.

The latest addition, King's Business School, is now one of the main providers of undergraduate management teaching in London.

King's has a particularly distinguished reputation in the humanities, law, the sciences (including a wide range of health areas such as psychiatry, medicine, dentistry, psychology and forensic science) plus social sciences including management, economics, war studies, law and international relations. It is the largest centre for the education of healthcare professionals in Europe.

For the coming intake in September 2022, international students applying to the Geography BA/BSc course as well as Global Health and Social Medicine BA/BSc course will be eligible for a £9,250 (RM52,468) undergraduate scholarship. The scholarship will be awarded through assessment of academic performance.

Through contact with world-class academics, students will benefit from the collaborative, cross-disciplinary approach that has ensured the research, teaching and learning are globally recognised and respected.

King's College London's Maughan Library is the largest new university library in the UK.

Students will also enjoy the outstanding connections with the city's cultural, political, legal and health institutions, providing opportunities to build networks and develop invaluable skills.

With over 1,800 Malaysian alumni and 355 current Malaysian students across the university's five campuses, it is one of the world's great universities, balancing an outstanding reputation for world-class research and teaching.

For almost 200 years, King's research has been, and continues to be world leading, producing graduates that are some of the most employable in the world.

Learn more about studying at the Kings' College London as it will be participating at AUG Student Services' upcoming Go! Further Studies Education Fair from Jan 9 to 15 at two cities across West Malaysia and one stop for virtual education fair:

– Jan 9 (Sunday), E & O Hotel, Penang, noon to 6pm

– Jan 13 (Thursday), Virtual Education Fair @ ZOOM, noon to 6pm

– Jan 15 (Saturday), KSL Hotel, Johor Baru, noon to 6pm

■ Register for the event now at *www.augstudy.com/eventbrite-event/go-further-studies-education-fair-dec21/*

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A dream worth pursuing

IT is very common for a young child to say, "One day, I am going to be a doctor." Doctors have always been familiar characters in a person's life; at one time or another, we would have had to visit a physician.

It is no wonder today, medicine is still a career of choice for young Malaysians leaving high school.

But in the changing face of the world and community today, the medical profession has evolved from the traditional role of "rescuer from pain" to a partner-personality whom you could work closely with to live healthily.

Qualifying with an MBBS is merely the first step as it is no longer a fixed road of being a practising clinician.

"Students have multiple pathways these days upon qualifying as a doctor," said Manipal University College Malaysia (MUCM) Faculty of Medicine dean Prof Dr Adinegara Lutfi Abas.

"They can choose to remain in practice, to advance into research, go into corporate organisations by becoming a hospital manager or administrator, or occupational health specialist, or choose to serve the community by being in public health."

Students through the FIS programme are able to strengthen their research skills through POSMED – an activity that includes topic research, poster presentation and prototype creation.

Soon-to-be doctors are regularly tested on various knowledge and skills in a simulation room that creates highly realistic scenarios for procedural training.

The practitioner

The world can never have too many physicians. With the growing population, doctor practitioners are still much needed in all sectors of society.

While the hours may seem long and not family-friendly, it boils down to individual choice. As the saying goes, "do what you love, and you never have to work a day in your life".

"Furthermore, medicine is one of the fields which caters for a varied range of interest, in terms of the specialisations that one can opt to go into," Dr Adinegara added.

MUCM hosts workshops for United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE), Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board (PLAB), and various Royal College fellowship and membership exam preparation courses at its Melaka campus.

The researcher

Doctors who are constantly intrigued by how things start, get resolved or how diseases are cured – the pathway to becoming a researcher would be a good choice.

Research work is also more structured today as compared to before, whereby evidence collected is based on a cross-section of causes. With the advent of systematic review, physician research is now part of a larger multidisciplinary team as the study must incorporate a complete, exhaustive summary of current evidence relevant to the subject matter.

The community adviser

If it has always been your dream to treat communities, the role of a doctor as a community adviser by way of being in public health would be the right path for you.

Strong love of medicine along with mathematics and statistics are the core in excelling in this pathway.

By being able to read into trends and form analytical solutions, a public health physician would be better able to formulate strategic preventive measures.

Where to complete your MBBS

MUCM, formerly known as Melaka-Manipal Medical College, is one of the top medical schools. Since its inception, over 6,000 medical and some 400 dental surgeons have entered both the Malaysian and overseas international health systems, with many alumni progressing successfully into specialist careers of their choosing.

As a university college, MUCM's twinning programmes evolved into fully Malaysian home-grown programmes.

Students are guided to find their true paths before graduation as they interact with real lives of doctors, researchers, and public health individuals through its annual postgraduate fair and monthly seminars and exhibitions.

Parents and students are encouraged to visit MUCM and experience life as a future "Manipalite".

■ For more information, call 1700 811 662 or log on to *www.manipal.edu.my*

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Taking on the challenge

TWENTY-NINE students from Management and Science University (MSU) School of Hospitality and Creative Arts (SHCA), including a husband-and-wife pair and two siblings, have done the university proud with their achievements at the recent third Selangor International Culinary Festival (SICF 2021).

Awarded the SICF 2021's Most Outstanding as well as a Gold Medal in the Heritage Cuisine, Nasi Ambeng Platter category is Nursyairin Nadhira Eyzat Mustapha from the Bachelor in Culinary Arts (Hons) programme.

Among the criteria Nursyairin Nadhira was judged on was composition, in which her ingredients and side dishes must be in harmony with the main piece in quantity and colour; creativity against degree of difficulty, where her artistry was weighed along with the effort expended; presentation and portion size; correct preparation, recipe and method; and practical, up-to-date serving.

Three silver and one bronze completed the medal tally for MSU from the Heritage Cuisine Nasi Ambeng Platter category. The silver medallists are Rabi'atul Adawiyyah Fauzan and Ainur Afiqah Abd Aziz, also from MSU's Bachelor in Culinary Arts (Hons) programme and their lecturer Aiman Hafiz Jalani.

The bronze was awarded to Jayganesh Thanasegaran from MSU's Diploma in Culinary Arts programme.

Another gold medal went to MSU through the Ready-to-Eat (RTE) Meals category, with Mohd Fazreen Hairol Anuar from the Bachelor in Culinary Arts (Hons) programme as the winner. From the same programme comes RTE Meals silver medallist Kang Chai Kiat and bronze medallist Amirul Najhan Norhisham.

MSU students have done the university proud with their achievements.

Two bronze medals were bagged in the Pastry Artistic Showpiece category through Shafikah Nuriman Md Nazri and Muhammad Salihin Mohd Noor Azmi, respectively from MSU's Bachelor in Patisserie Arts (Hons) and Diploma in Patisserie Arts programmes.

SICF 2021's Pastry Artistic Showpiece category presented four diplomas to MSU – two to Bachelor in Patisserie Arts (Hons) students Kokila Vani Ravi and Noor Ain Fariza Zainodin, and two to Diploma in Patisserie Arts students Arissa Ruthlene Zawari and Syahira Mohd Abdul Nasir.

One bronze medal from the Pulut Kuning category, through Effazatul Ekma Supanate from the Bachelor in Culinary Arts (Hons) programme.

Pulut Kuning also presented three diplomas to programme lecturer Muhammad Hakim Hamdan as well as Diploma in Culinary Arts twins Tihana Athilah Rosli and Tihani Aqilah Rosli.

MSU, through the School of Hospitality and Creative Arts (SHCA) complements the needs for highly skilled and expert human capital in the hospitality and tourism industry. The school currently offers bachelor's degree and diploma programmes in Culinary Arts, Patisserie Arts, Hospitality and Tourism Management, Event Management, Outdoor Recreation Management, Spa Management and Airlines Services Management as well as Fashion Design with Marketing.

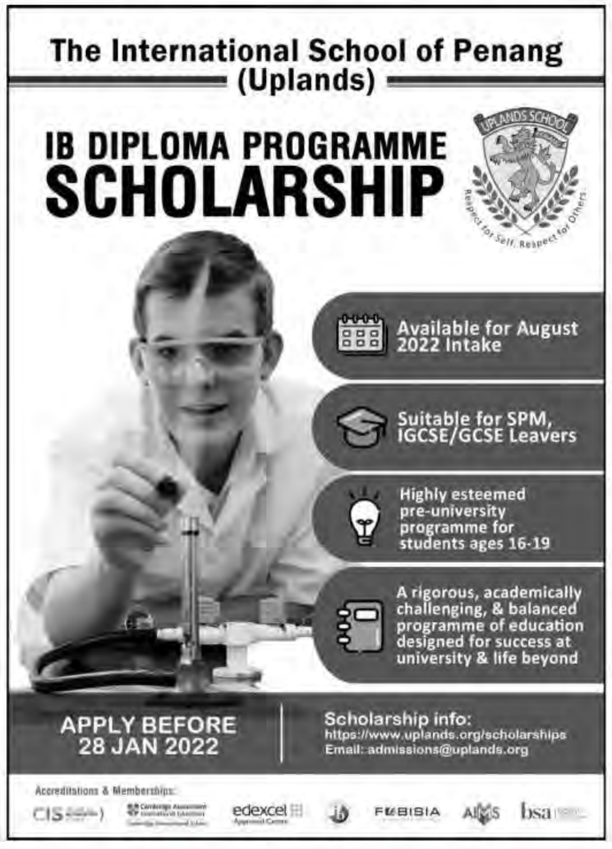
As a top university in Malaysia, MSU prioritises student development to enhance graduate employability. With 98.7% of its graduates successfully securing employment within six months of graduation, MSU is ranked by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) as Malaysia's No.1 for graduate employability.

Blending technical vocational education and training (TVET) with traditional academic curricula, MSU enhances competencies with industry internship, community and creative entrepreneurship, as well as global exposure – empowering MSU graduates with the well-roundedness desired and sought after by employers.

Various skills enhancement programmes aimed to improve students' competitiveness are offered. The Graduate Employability Skills (GEmS) and Personal Enrichment Competencies (PEC) programme at MSU serves to improve students' soft skills.

In all, as an applied, enterprise, holistic and international university, MSU offers foundation, undergraduate, postgraduate and flexible programmes through an entry system that facilitates admission of students from all walks of life, aimed at "Transforming Lives and Enriching Future".

■ For details, look out for the advertisement in this *StarSpecial*.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IPOH DK248-02 (B) Tel: 05-525 2395
TERENGGANU DK248-03 (T) Tel: 09-631 2788
SABAH DK248-04 (S) Tel: 088-221 977
JOHOR BAHRU DK248-05 (W) Tel: 07-336 4656
SHAH ALAM DK248-06 (B) Tel: 03-5521 6789
SEREMBAN DK248-07 (N) Tel: 06-764 8686
SARAWAK DK248-08 (Q) Tel: 082-464 270
SUNGAI PETANI DK248-09 (K) Tel: 04-425 7602
collegiate institution of : msu management & science university
03 5521 6868
msucollege | www.msucollege.edu.my

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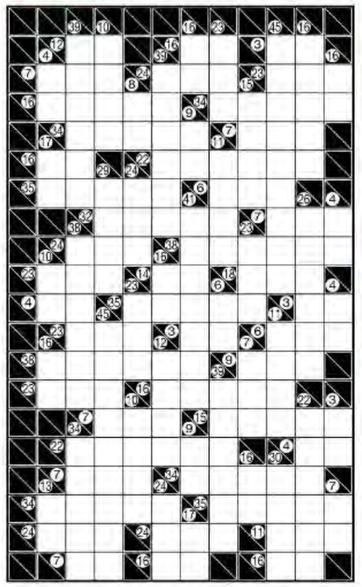
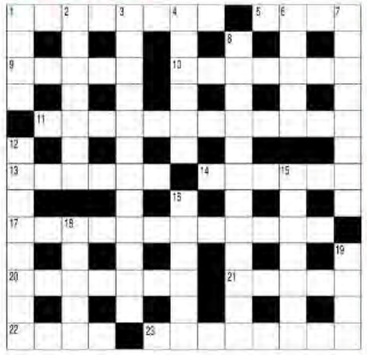


1. Put numbers from 1 through 9 in each cell (no zeros.)
2. A number in a cell divided by a diagonal line tells the sum of the numbers in the consecutive cells to its right or downward.
3. No number may appear more than once in consecutive cells.

CROSSWORD



Across

1 Diana's bloomer is a catastrophe (8)
5 Odile leaves a large creature for a shorter version (4)
9 A better supplier of eggs (5)
10 Walk between the plants (7)
11 Providing care and keeping an eye on later (7,5)
13 The source of a writer's material (6)
14 It's plain to Russians (6)
17 From whom royal lines emanate (4,8)
20 Formic solution to indigestion? (7)
21 Seven different levels (5)
22 A misshapen nose ages (4)
23 Acts as chairman but shows partiality in advance? (8)

Down

1 Herb that makes many unwell (4)
2 An exacting role in Shakespeare (7)
3 The good fortune to get a hole in one? (6,2,4)
4 Express at even greater length? (6)
6 Pole on the run (5)
7 Yet they enjoy some standing at a meeting (8)
8 Be the first to reveal intelligence (5,3,4)
12 Lose track of account in simple form (8)
15 Where to find the colliery boss? (7)
16 Killing the upsurge of revolutionary spirit (6)
18 Taken in by a consumer (5)
19 Goddess is after Spanish agreement being lifted (4)

> Solutions on page 16

KEE'S WORLD by C.W. Kee

WUMO by Wulff & Morgenthaler

You already finished that whole gallon of ice cream, Judith? The movie hasn't even started yet ...
But it just tasted so goood ... oh no, my tummy hurts ...

SHOE by Jeff Macnelly

GARFIELD by Jim Davis

TV Guide

TV1

5.58am	Negaraku
6.00	Bacaan Yassin
6.30	Mukjizat Dan Sains
7.00	Berita Pagi Nasional
7.10	Salam Pagi
8.00	Selamat Pagi Malaysia
11.00	Menu Ronda-Ronda
11.30	Adat Perkahwinan Bomeo
12.05pm	Kampung Baru Danial
12.30	Jiwa Kacau
1.00	Berita Tengah Hari
1.30	PSA Covid-19
2.00	Biz Malaysia
2.30	Optik
2.50	PSA Covid-19
3.05	Anda Musykil
4.05	Kita Dah Sampai
4.30	Destinasi Hijau
5.00	Berita Wilayah
6.00	PSA Covid-19
6.30	Cina Muslim Di Malaysia
7.00	Tilawah Interaktif
8.00	Berita Perdana
9.00	Forum Perdana Ehwal Islam
10.00	Agrotek
10.30	Berita Parlimen
11.00	Berita Dunia
11.30	5 Bujang
Midnight	Berita Tengah Malam
12.30am	4 Penjuru
1.00	PSA Covid-19
1.30	Denai Warisan
2.00	Kita Dah Sampai
2.30	Citarasa Medika
3.00	Agrotek
3.30	Awas!
4.00	Puncak Asean
4.30	Pada Suatu Ketika
5.00	Sneakers Merah Jambu
5.30	Cina Muslim Di Malaysia

TV2

6.00am	Tak Tercapai Akalmu
7.00	Rainbow
7.30	Mac & Ted
8.00	Matt
8.30	Raihan Rangers
9.00	Rudy Vs Jolie
10.00	Jom Shoppe
11.00	Janji Diana
Noon	Berita Mandarin
12.30pm	Updates @ Noon
1.00	Geng Wassap
1.30	Dolunay
2.30	Kelas Sebelah
3.00	Walking With Darkness
5.00	Bagaikan Novel Cinta
6.00	Raihan Rangers
6.30	Blaze & The Monster Machine
7.00	Berita Mandarin
7.30	Berita Tamil
8.00	Jangan Pernah Lupakan Aku
9.00	The Mysterious Family
11.00	Hiburan Minggu Ini
Midnight	Jangan Pening
12.30am	Air Di Bumi Matador
1.30	Ladang Pak Awang
2.00	Pani Malar
2.30	Anbin Valai
3.00	When Petals Bloom
4.00	Mr Stailista

TV3

6.30am	Bacaan Yasin
6.50	Tanyalah Ustaz
8.00	Cinta Sekali Lagi
9.00	Buletin Pagi
9.30	Malaysia Hari Ini
10.32	Wow Shop
11.00	Supersquad
11.32	Rahsia Rasa
Noon	Wanita Hari Ini
1.00pm	Wow Shop
1.30	Buletin 130
2.00	Asalkan Dia Bahagia
3.00	Dian
4.02	Yehh Jadu Hai Jinn Kai
5.00	Boboiboy
5.35	Alaa Bib
6.00	Seribu Rindu
7.00	Shakira
8.00	Buletin Utama
9.02	28 Hari Mencari Cinta
10.00	Saat Kau Takluk Cinta ini
11.00	The Penthouse
Midnight	Nightline
12.30am	Saat Kau Takluk Cinta ini
1.30	Hot FM @ TV3
2.30	Kapsul Surah
3.00	Bacaan Yasin
3.20	Tanyalah Ustaz
4.30	Shakira
5.30	Wow Shop

ntv7

7.00am	Aktif & Kokurikulum
8.00	Menengah Atas
10.00	Tahap II
Noon	Tahap I
1.00pm	Buletin Didik
1.30	Mat Yoyo
2.00	Menengah Rendah
4.00	Sukses SPM
6.00	Aktif & Kokurikulum
7.00	Totally Rubbish
7.30	Buletin Didik
8.00	Sukses SPM
9.00	Bimbing Tingkatan 4 & 5
10.00	Majalah Didik
11.00	Mari Bercerita
11.30	Ke Jepun Ke Kita?

8TV

7.00am	Living Delight
8.00	Back To The Foodture
8.30	Wow Shop
10.30	The Legend Of Taiwan
11.30	Wow Shop
12.30pm	Mandarin News
1.00	Forensic Heroes IV
2.00	Living Delight
3.30	Born Into Loving Hands
5.30	8 E-News
6.00	Young Blood
7.00	Armed Reaction
8.00	Mandarin News
9.02	Love & Redemption
10.00	My Best Friend's Story
11.00	Zhao Yao: Love Story Of Devil Angel
12.30am	Martial Universe
1.30	8FM @ 8TV

TV9

6.00am	Kapsul Surah
6.30	Tanyalah Ustaz
8.30	Wow Shop
1.30pm	Senario
2.00	Wow Shop
6.00	Boboiboy
6.30	Ejen Ali
7.00	Buletin TV9
7.30	Sembang Viral
7.40	Wanthong
8.30	Oh My Hantaran
9.30	99 Kali Rindu
11.30	Wow Shop
12.30am	Abang Sado Boleh Beres
1.00	Oh My Hataran
2.00	Mr Boss Ms Stalker
3.00	Senario
3.30	Buletin FM
4.30	Kalis Kasih
5.30	Jejak Rasul

STARSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 20): If you have a lot of meetings planned - in person or online - then make sure you double-check all arrangements. The more organised you are, the less likelihood there'll be mix-ups along the way.

TAURUS (April 21-May 21): Group activities, education and solving problems are highlighted today Taurus. But - if you don't check all the facts thoroughly - then mistakes, confusion and uncertainty are likely.

GEMINI (May 22-June 21): There may be conflict and confusion between work and relationships, as professional responsibilities take precedence. You think you know how someone is feeling but are you way off the mark?

CANCER (June 22-July 23): Work or education will be challenging, as you have to deal with an unrealistic and challenging deadline. Don't waste energy complaining Crabs! Just put your head down and get on with it.

LEO (July 24-Aug 23): Retrograde Venus cramps your Leo style. Loved ones may disappoint you by failing to appreciate your creative genius. Just remember you are fabulous - even when people aren't applauding!

VIRGO (Aug 24-Sep 23): A loved one will perplex you today, Virgo, so don't try to second-guess what they say or do. Instead, keep yourself occupied with interesting projects and plenty of invigorating physical activity.

LIBRA (Sep 24-Oct 23): You could feel tired and discouraged today, Libra, as your to-do list increases while your motivation and energy levels plummet. It's a passing phase so just roll up your sleeves and get to it.

SCORPIO (Oct 24-Nov 22): Communicating with a partner, child or close friend will be difficult and misunderstandings are likely. It's also not a good time to make an expensive purchase, as you may regret it later on.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 23-Dec 21): If you don't slow down and pace yourself, Sagittarius, then you'll end up smack bang in the middle of a misunderstanding. So take your time and don't believe everything you hear!

CAPRICORN (Dec 22-Jan 20): Avoid getting lost in a sea of confusion, Capricorn. Forethought and planning will take you far, as you process information carefully before you act. Keep working towards a long-term goal.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21-Feb 19): Expect some confusion today regarding a financial matter. The stars encourage you to come up with a clever and creative plan to boost cash flow. But get a second opinion before you proceed.

PISCES (Feb 20 - March 20): There's a tendency to get carried away with unrealistic schemes. To avoid disappointing yourself - and others - make sure you stay on top of facts and leave fantasy for the movies.

SUDOKU *© NIKOLI Co Ltd, Japan*

	2	5	4					
	8		1					6
	3		2					4
	5	8	7		3	6	9	
4					8		7	
7					6		3	
					2	5	1	

Fill up each 3x3 box, as well as each row and column, with all the numbers 1 to 9.

For tips and techniques for solving Sudoku puzzles, go to nikoli.co.jp/en/puzzles/sudoku.html.

DOODLISM by Sarah Salim

IG:@sarahsalim.official

SOLUTIONS

2	6	9	4	7	8	3	1	5
7	1	5	2	6	3	9	4	8
8	3	4	6	1	5	2	9	7
3	7	2	8	5	9	1	6	4
1	9	6	3	4	7	8	5	2
4	5	8	1	9	2	7	3	6
6	4	7	5	2	1	9	8	3
9	8	1	7	3	4	5	2	6
5	2	3	9	8	6	4	7	1

StarMetro

THE STAR, THURSDAY 6 JANUARY 2022 Content: (03) 7967 1388 ext 1706/1323/1496 metro@thestar.com.my Advertising: (03) 7966 8388 Classified: (03) 7966 8200

Rich harvest: Cockles, locally dubbed 'black gold', can only breed in certain states, namely Johor, Melaka, Selangor and Perak.

Cockle hub for Pontian

The district in Johor is set to have lion's share of 15 farms under pilot project

By REMAR NORDIN
metro@thestar.com.my

THE Johor Fisheries Department plans to introduce 10 cockle farms this year, mainly centred in Pontian.

It is part of the state government's initiative to turn the Pontian district into the national cockle hub.

Department director Zainudin Abd Wahab said the project would be conducted in phases with a maximum of 15 fishermen for each cockle farm.

He said the state government had allocated RM500,000 for the two-year programme.

"Johor Land and Mines Department (PTG) has given us the green light.

"We are looking at 15 plots in total, with 10 starting this year.

"We will begin with two plots in Pontian within the first quarter of this year, followed by two plots in Muar, three in Batu Pahat and the remaining three in Pontian as well," he said.

He added that the five additional plots would be set up next year in Pontian too.

Zainudin said each plot would be about 30ha wide.

Expanding fishing industry

The initiative was announced by Mentri Besar Datuk Hasni Mohammad during the Johor Budget 2022 speech last November.

Currently, the department is in the final phase of discussions with the land office on granting temporary occupation licence (TOL) to the fishermen involved.

It is also finalising the list of participants for the entire programme.

"Most importantly, we already have the place to run the project and identified the cockle farmers who will start the initiative in Pontian.

"The project's success or failure will depend on participants' willingness as they will be fully in charge from start to finish.

"This is part of the myKomuniti Perikanan (myKP) programme," said Zainudin, adding that it would be a two-year pilot project.

MyKP was launched in 2018 by Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Ministry to expand the fishing industry.

The Fisheries Department website states that up to March 21, 153 myKP have been set up.

Zainudin said the project could take up to 12 months before it showed results, as such only full-time cockle farmers would be allowed to take part.

"We will start by cleaning the base for the cockle cultivation plot before scattering the seeds.

"The cost is minimal as these are already natural breeding grounds for cockles.

"From then on, each farmer will be responsible for protecting their plots, especially against theft.

"They cannot expect government agencies to patrol these areas 24 hours a day.

"But since they are part of myKP, they can report suspicious activities in their area," he said, adding that the fishermen would be the department's eyes and ears.

Zainudin said cockles were considered "black gold" locally and could only breed in certain states aside from Johor, namely Perak, Selangor and Melaka.

"We want to expand the industry as currently, we do not have enough for local consumption.

"So through this project, we hope to increase our production rate and perhaps export cockles to neighbouring countries such as Singapore and Thailand," he said.

Huge potential in growing industry

Zainudin highlighted that last year, the department recorded over 628 metric tonnes of cockles, nearly five times the amount harvested in 2020 (146 metric tonnes), while the figure for 2019 was 179 metric tonnes.

"So, clearly, there is huge potential to grow this industry, and we hope this project will be the starting point," he said.

"The market for cockles is expanding. About 30 years ago, 70kg could fetch only RM35 but people would still think twice about buying it.

"But today, the price could be 10 times higher as demand for the mollusc continues to soar," he noted.

Reminiscing on his early years harvesting cockles, fisherman Dawik Mohammad Ali, 58, said there were so many cockles in Ayer Baloi, Pontian, but not many people consumed them back then.

> TURN TO PAGE 3

Solve the dead fish problem at park, authorities urged

By NGEOW YI TING
metro@thestar.com.my

KUALA Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) has suggested installing a machine to enable aeration in the lake at Kepong Metropolitan Park, Kuala Lumpur.

However, Kepong MP Lim Lip Eng said there was no sign of the suggestion being implemented yet.

His political secretary Lee Jia Haur said he received many complaints from nearby residents and park visitors every year about the pungent smell from dead fishes in the lake.

"This happens two to three times a year.

"We have complained to DBKL many times before regarding this issue and they have taken the lake's water sample to the lab before to investigate.

"They concluded that there were no toxic chemicals or substances in the water and explained that the fish were dying because of the over-production of algae in the lake, which competed with the fishes for oxygen," he said.

He added that dead fishes in the lake had been a problem at the Kepong park since 2018.

"What looked like grease to us on the water surface, DBKL had identified as just thick algae.

"DBKL suggested installing an aerator that will increase oxygen in the lake," said Lee.

"However, we don't see any machines being built so far.

"This is a concern for the people who come to the park as not only is it smelly, but the cleanliness is not up to par and the view of the lake is unpleasant."

He said residents in the surrounding area were facing the same problem.

"We will continue to write to DBKL to find a way to prevent this from happening in the future," he added.

Lim said Federal Territories Ministry had informed him that RM570,000 was allocated yearly in the 2020 and 2021 budget to maintain and clean Kepong Metropolitan Park, while RM1.1mil and RM1.9mil had been allocated respectively in 2020 and 2021 to improve and enhance the landscape.

He said the allocations were not reflected in the state of the park.

"The dead fishes in the lake is a testament to this."

He said the issue had also been highlighted to Environment and Water Minister Datuk Seri Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man, and urged the ministry to come up with a solution this year.

45,000 tonnes of rubbish collected after floods

First round of waste collection to be completed by Sunday, says exco man

By SHEILA SRI PRIYA and C.Y. LEE
metro@thestar.com.my

This field in Hulu Langat serves as a temporary waste transfer station before the rubbish is sent to the landfill.

SOME 45,000 tonnes of rubbish was collected in the post-flood clean-up by KDEB Waste Management Sdn Bhd as at Jan 4.

These included damaged household items that had been collected after the floods in Shah Alam, Hulu Langat, Sepang, Kuala Langat and Klang on Dec 17 and 18, said Selangor local government, public transportation and new village development committee chairman Ng Sze Han.

The amount of rubbish collected is similar to the weight of 25,000 adult elephants.

Ng said KDEB had collected 31,000 tonnes of waste in Shah Alam when cleaning works in areas such as Taman Sri Muda began a week ago after floodwaters subsided.

He expects the first round of waste collection to be completed on Sunday.

"There are many others involved in waste collection efforts so the amount of rubbish collected should be more.

"We understand the people's predicament of wanting to repair their belongings instead of throwing them away.

"Those who want to throw away their damaged items are urged to leave them outside their houses, as rubbish is being collected constantly," said Ng.

He said KDEB contractors made frequent trips to clear rubbish.

"Waste is sent to the transfer station before being moved to the landfill," he added.

Ng also said that Shah Alam City Council (MBSA) and KDEB contractors were working at night to ensure effective collection of rubbish in areas such as Taman Sri Muda.

"Some of the affected areas are commercial areas.

"It is difficult for garbage trucks to navigate in commercial areas during the day, so the contractors go at night to pick up waste."

He said the Selangor State Disaster Management Unit was working closely with the relevant district offices to monitor the flood situation.

"District offices will send out early warnings not limited to flood but also other disasters.

"They will also coordinate closely with the armed forces," said Ng, who thanked the many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who assisted flood victims to clear rubbish.

"I hope the NGOs can assist by sending rubbish to the transfer stations instead of throwing them into roll-on roll-off bins in the neighbourhoods.

"This will be of great help to waste collectors in speeding up the rubbish disposal process," he added.

Kampung Tunku assemblyman Lim Yi Wei, who lent a hand in Taman Sri Muda and Kampung Bukit Lanchong, said flood victims were in need of high-powered water jets to get rid of mud in their homes.

"Some still need petrol-powered water jets because they don't have power supply. My team also sent two water tanks for cleaning purposes," she said.

Meanwhile, Shah Alam deputy mayor Mohd Rashidi Ruslan said 13 out of 21 localities affected by the flood in December had been cleaned up.

Eight areas are left and they include Padang Jawa, Kampung Baru Hicom, Taman Sri Muda, Kampung Lombong, Kampung Kebun Bunga, Jalan Kebun and Kampung Bukit Lanchong.

Rashidi said progress in each of these areas was over 70%.

"We have used more than 1,500 lorries, 317 heavy machinery such as excavators, road sweepers and backhoes for the clean-up.

"Phase two will take place from Jan 10 to 20 as we expect there will be more rubbish to come.

"We will maintain the number of assets to help in phase two," he added.

STAR METRO WATCH

FLOOD AID
Shah Alam City Council (MBSA) is distributing essential supplies and dry food to flood victims. Donations can be sent to Wisma MBSA (flood operations room) daily from 8am to 5pm. Donations can also be banked into their account. For details, call 012-388 9235 (Nor Hamimi) or 019-214 0164 (Juliah).

EMERGENCY HOTLINE
Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) has launched a 24-hour hotline for city folk to lodge complaints on fallen trees, collapsed lamp posts, oil spills on roads, as well as snakes and beehives. Send photos and location via WhatsApp to 011-653 99004 or call 03-9284 3434.

FREE BIN RENTAL
Pharmaceutical Association of Malaysia is sponsoring 300 RoRo bins to expedite rubbish disposal. Selection of applications will be based on urgency. Terms and conditions apply. Go to https://forms.gle/AhWNdxZsjPfT1Gxd6 and for enquiries, email phama@pharma.org.my

PARKING FEES
Seremban City Council has enforced parking charges in Nilai involving commercial areas of Taman Semarak, Taman Desa Jasmin, Taman Desa Cempaka, Pekan Nilai and Putra Nilai. Motorists can pay via apps such as Jom Parking and Flexi Parking. Parking compounds can be paid at Wisma MBS or by scanning the QR code on the compound notice for online payments. For details, call 06-765 4782/4785/ 4789.

PONGGAL BAZAAR
Malaysian Ceylonese National Community Centre (MCNCC) will hold a ponggal bazaar called Darbar Bazaar from 10am to 8pm on Jan 8 and 9 at the MCNCC Hall at No 15, Jalan 18/16, Taman Kanagapuram, Petaling Jaya.

CNY BAZAAR APPLICATION
Klang Municipal Council (MPK) has opened the applications for trading spots at Chinese New Year bazaars. The bazaars will run from Jan 18 to Feb 17. Applications can be made at iportal.mpklang.gov.my/permitonline until Jan 7. Balloting will be done live via MPK's Facebook page.

SELVAX BOOSTER
Selangor folk can book an appointment for their free booster jabs under Selvax Booster programme via the Selangkah app. Users need to input a voucher code specific to their preferred Selcare clinic. The voucher codes are available on all Selangkah social media platforms.

TRAIN TICKETS
The Electric Train Service (ETS) and KTM Intercity tickets for trips from Jan 15 to June 30 is available for sale. The public can buy tickets via the KTMB app or Keretapi Tanah Melayu Bhd website. For details, call 03-2267 1200 or visit the website.

SKYWALK REOPENED
Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) has reopened its Forest Skywalk. Bookings can be made at skywalk.frim.gov.my or email frim_enquiry@frim.gov.my (for more than 10 people). For details, visit facebook.com/FRIMKepong/posts/229951345833704

INDIAN WEDDING FAIR
Malaysia's Premier Indian Wedding and Bridal Fair 2022 will be held from 11am to 9pm from Jan 7 to 9 at Level 1, Agenda Suria Convention Centre @ Galeri Mufors, Subang Jaya. For details, call 03-2278 5555, 03 2201 6255 or WhatsApp 016 290 5585.

PERAK

Online purchase issues top complaints from consumers

By IVAN LOH
ivanloh@thestar.com.my

ISSUES over online transactions topped the list of complaints in Perak last year, state Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry director Saifullizan Kamarul Zaman said.

He said 544 complaints were received, including over mismatched products and unfair prices.

"The majority of consumer complaints involved receiving items that did not match what was ordered.

"We remind consumers to ensure that the websites they buy from are legitimate and that the seller is registered with the ministry," Saifullizan told a press conference after a Keluarga Malaysia "Maximum Price Control Scheme" walkabout and check at the Ipoh Central Market yesterday.

He advised consumers to compare prices between various online platforms to get the best deals and avoid being cheated.

"Those who face issues with online sellers can lodge a complaint with the ministry," he said, adding that other complaints lodged by consumers related to unfair pricing (201 cases), unclear services (179), motor vehicle workshops (52) and price of controlled items (37).

Saifullizan said there were no problems concerning the supply of chicken, fish, vegetables or eggs in Perak.

"Supply for these items is stable.

"The price of certain vegetables and fish have gone down," he said, adding that the differing prices were due to poor weather conditions.

"Prices for chickens, eggs and vegetables have stabilised as these are included in the price control scheme.

"Sellers do not necessarily have to sell at prices set by the government as they can also sell at a lower price," he added.

The scheme, implemented since Dec 7 last year until Feb 4, is to stabilise prices of essential items and ensure adequate supply.

With regard to enforcement of the scheme, Saifullizan said RM2,200 worth of compounds were issued and RM1,000 worth of items were seized.

"There were 15 cases. Thirteen of them did not display price tags properly and two had been caught for overpricing controlled items.

"We hope traders will continue to adhere to the laws," he added.

Saifullizan (in white shirt) and his officers checking the prices of seafood and vegetables at the Ipoh Central Market. – RONNIE CHIN/The Star

The Star revises cover price

Dear readers,

From January 10, 2022, the cover price of *The Star* and *Sunday Star* will be revised to RM2.00.

Thank you for your support.

TheStar

JOHOR

Fishermen eager to be part of lucrative venture

> FROM PAGE 1

"I would have to beg people to buy them from me because cockles were not a 'mainstream' menu item back then," he said.

In time, demand for cockles grew and before he knew it, there were about 14 fishermen "competing" against him in the market.

"There used to be just a handful of us, and the '*tauke*' (market owner) from Batu Pahat would only buy a 70kg bag a day.

"But then the market grew, and I no longer had the strength to provide 70kg a day on my own, so I asked my friends to harvest cockles instead," said Dawik, who is the myKP chief in Ayer Baloi.

He claimed that he could easily obtain 70kg of cockles in the morning, sell them in the afternoon and return in the evening, adding that this was his routine now.

Dawik said one kilogramme of cockles could fetch up to RM10 today, depending on the size.

Sustainable practices

According to Dawik, the harvesting period for cockles is usually from September to December, while the mating season is from January to June.

"We usually do not harvest until August as the size of the cockles will be too small otherwise for consumption.

"We can only harvest once we get clearance from the Fisheries Research Institute and Johor Fisheries Department," he said, adding that a harvesting permit would only be issued during this period.

Currently, there are 34 fishermen in Ayer Baloi in the cockles business and each of them is only allowed to harvest a maximum of 100kg a day.

Ismail says there should be engagement with the fishing community to ensure the success of the cockle farming project.

"We want to ensure this natural resource is sustainable and not overharvested," said Dawik.

He revealed that there were six other locations for harvesting cockles in Pontian, namely Tampok, Benut, Sanglang, Pulai Sebatang, Api-Api and Pontian Besar.

On the cockle farming project by the Johor Fisheries Department, he expressed hope that the department would address the issue of theft.

Win-win proposition for all

Pulai Sebatang MyKP chief Ismail Mohd Hassan, 50, said more engagement was needed between the state government, Johor Fisheries Department and fishermen in Pontian on the cockles project.

"We want to help ensure this pilot project is successful as it will be a win-win situation for all.

"This project is something new, not only for the fishermen but also the department and government.

"Usually with something new, there will be hiccups along the way, and some issues may require government intervention," he said.

Ismail Mohd added that expanding the cockle industry in Pontian and turning it into an agro-tourism product would be good for the district.

Meanwhile, fisherman Hairul Salleh Md Tahir, 50, is in charge of operating the cockle cleaning tank system dubbed "Molluscure".

"The system was developed by Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and has been used by the fishing community here since 2016 to clean harvested cockles.

"The cleaning tank helps remove toxic metals from the cockles," he said, explaining that the process could take up to three hours for two tonnes of cockles.

He added that rainwater, a vinegar reagent and sea salt were used during the cleaning process.

Aside from cockles, the state Fisheries Department is also planning a lobster farming project.

Hairul Salleh (right) operating the cleaning tank together with Dawik. – THOMAS YONG/The Star

(Below) A fisherman sorting freshly caught cockles according to their size in Pulai Sebatang, Pontian.

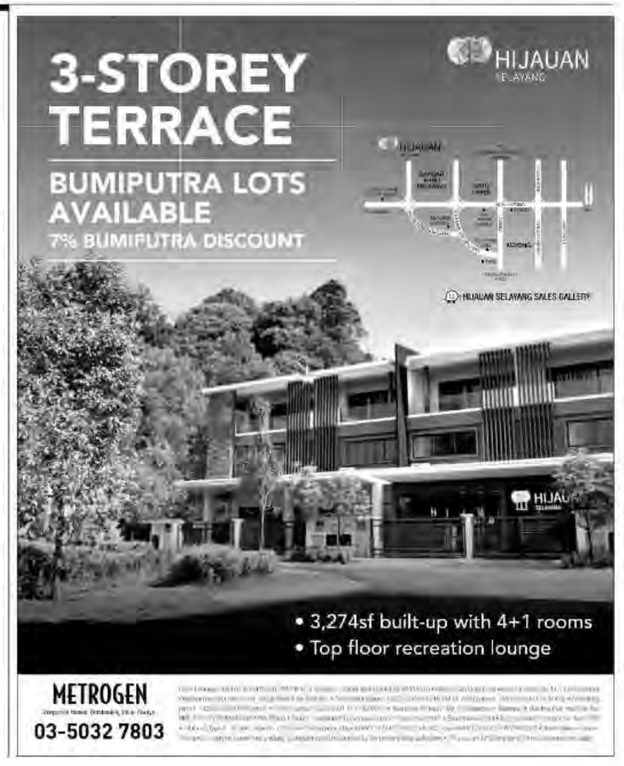
Singapore tv

Channel 5
6.00AM: Mini Ninjas **6.30:** Pokemon the Series: Sun & Moon **7.00:** Blaze And The Monster Machines **7.30:** Go Jetters **8.00:** Counting With Paula **8.30:** Titipo the Little Train **9.00:** Sesame Street **9.30:** Paw Patrol **10.00:** Ollie And Friends **10.30:** Shimmer And Shine **11.00:** Blaze And The Monster Machines **11.30:** Go Jetters **NOON:** Island Feast With Peter Kuruvita **12.30PM:** Jamie's Quick and Easy Food **1.00:** Wheel Of Fortune **1.30:** Kin **2.00:** Tanglin **2.30:** The World's Deadliest Weather **3.00:** Mini Ninjas **3.30:** Pokemon the Series: Sun & Moon **4.00:** Grizzy & The Lemmings **4.15:** Grizzy & The Lemmings **4.30:** The Enchantimals: Tales From Everwilde **5.00:** Miraculous: Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir **5.30:** Cody Rock And The Quest For Macguvitonium **6.00:** Beat Shazam **7.00:** Wheel Of Fortune **7.30:** America's Got Talent **8.30:** Kin **9.00:** News Tonight **9.30:** Talking Point **10.00:** After Dark **11.00:** Heroes & Survivors **MIDNIGHT:** Kin **1.00AM:** Unnatural **1.30:** The Noise **2.00:** The World's Deadliest Weather **2.30:** After Dark 3.00: Just for Laughs Gags **4.00:** Island Feast With Peter Kuruvita **4.30:** Jamie's Quick and Easy Food **5.00:** Beat Shazam **6.00AM:** See tomorrow's schedule

Channel 8
6.00AM: Golden Age Talentime **7.00:** News Tonight **7.30:** Hello Singapore Highlights **8.00:** Leave No Soul Behind **9.00:** Morning Express **9.30:** The Heartland Hero **10.00:** My In Laws **10.30:** Spring Flower **11.30:** Spring Flower **12.30PM:** Deals For Joy **12.44:** Deals For Joy **12.58:** Deals For Joy **1.00:** News 8 At One **1.30:** Life Less Ordinary **2.00:** Magic Eye Is Back **2.30:** Silk Road Craft **3.00:** Deals For Joy **3.15:** Deals For Joy **3.30:** Wonder Women **4.30:** Taste Of Life **5.30:** My Star Bride **6.30:** Hello Singapore **7.30:** The Heartland Hero **8.00:** Towkay, Take a Break **9.00:** Leave No Soul Behind **10.00:** News Tonight **10.30:** Focus **11.00:** My Heroic Husband **MIDNIGHT:** Against The Tide **1.00AM:** Hawker Academy **2.00:** Tofu Street **3.00:** Tofu Street **4.00:** Taste Of Life **5.00:** The Journey: Tumultuous Times **6.00AM:** See tomorrow's schedule

Suria
9.00AM: Taman Mini **9.30:** Resipi Muara **10.00:** Cik Reen Cik Ngok Ngek **11.00:** Rindu Awak Separuh Nyawa **NOON:** Projek Cerpen **1.00PM:** Jalan Ampas **2.00** Cinta Buta **3.00:** Detik 2021/2022 **3.30:** Gotong Royong **4.00:** Cik Reen Cik Ngok Ngek **5.00:** Sempurna **6.00:** Taman Mini **6.30:** Resipi Muara **7.00:** Rindu Awak Separuh Nyawa **8.00:** Berita **8.30:** Misteri Minda **9.00:** Wira Kita **9.30:** Sempurna **10.30:** Identiti **11.00:** Dualiti (Debut!) **11.30:** Berita **MIDNIGHT:** Close

Vasantham
9.00AM: Kuralum Athan Porulum **9.30:** Super Samayal **10.00:** Kathaippoma **10.30:** Thilaanaa **11.00:** Adukku Vettu Annasamy 2: 80's Lootty! **11.30:** Achi International **NOON:** Lava Kusha (Movie) **3.00:** Osthi **4.00:** Varusham (Movie) **7.00:** Veetu Saapaadu **8.00:** Thilaanaa **8.30:** Tamil Seithi FY21/22 **9.00:** Ivan Yaaro **9.30:** Oru Nodiyil **10.00:** Oruvan **10.30:** Kavasam **11.00:** Sa Re Ga Mae Paadalgal 2020 **11.30:** Ethiroli **MIDNIGHT:** Tamil Seithi FY21/22 **12.30AM:** Close



In pursuit of ageless beauty

New skincare range uses three black superfoods to redefine youthfulness

THE Covid-19 pandemic has upturned the way people live, the effects of which show up in the skin's health.

Lack of sleep and higher stress levels lead to ageing skin, resulting in wrinkles, fine lines, loss of skin elasticity and firmness.

To address this, WonderLab Group, which is under Korean home appliance company Cuckoo International (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, has launched the WonderLab Bel-aek Ageless Series.

The launch at the White Room at Publika, Kuala Lumpur introduced the WonderLab Group, which markets brands WonderLab and WonderDewi to Malaysians, offering holistic beauty and wellness solutions.

"We are very excited to announce this refreshed and focused change with the introduction of the WonderLab Group and repositioning WonderLab as a brand," said Cuckoo International chief executive officer Hoe Kian Choon.

Hoe added that the move was a challenge and would take the focus in the beauty and wellness segment to the next level.

The WonderLab Bel-aek Ageless Series skincare range is backed by rigorous research and development.

Throughout the development of this series, WonderLab explored the true meaning of youth, a search that convinced the company to redefine its own concept of youthfulness – one that is not defined by age, but rather through healthier, younger-looking skin.

For that, WonderLab Bel-aek Ageless Series concentrated on three black superfoods to refresh and nourish skin for a lasting youthful effect.

Using the latest technology in the Korean beauty industry, the brand uses black rice, black sesame and black bean — dubbed as its Trio Black Complex.

According to Hoe, black rice is rich with antioxidants and boasts anti-inflammatory properties that strengthen the skin's barrier, while black sesame is claimed to have healing and soothing properties to protect skin from free radicals.

Black bean refines the skin with a healthy glow while boosting moisture for a youthful sheen, he added.

WonderLab Bel-aek Ageless Series' full range includes:

> Bel-aek Ageless Toner, which soothes and calms the skin with pore-refining effects;

> Bel-aek Ageless Serum, which is infused with fermented sea buckthorn that works to improve overall complexion; and

> Bel-aek Ageless Moisturiser, with its ultra-hydrating formulation infused with resurrection plant callus extract.

Hoe (right) and WonderLab Group chief marketing manager Queenie Goh Hui Teng at the launch of WonderLab Bel-aek Ageless Series. — AZLINA ABDULLAH/The Star

Each product under the series is elegantly packaged in a striking dark and black bottle to represent lasting beauty and class.

It is also designed to preserve the refined qualities and formulation of its potent ingredients.

The WonderLab Bel-aek Ageless Series is available at WonderLab's WonderStores nationwide and via WonderLab's sales agents.

Visit https://wonderlab.com.my/store-locator/ to locate the nearest Wonder store.

Largest fresh market grocer set to open in KL business district

A NEW grocer is set to open its doors, for customers looking for great savings in Kuala Lumpur.

NSK Grocer (KL) Sdn Bhd is having the grand opening of its first retail outlet in Quill City Mall, Jalan Sultan Ismail on Jan 8.

NSK Grocer is a collaboration between Versatile Creative Bhd and NSK Trading Sdn Bhd.

Occupying 80,000 sq ft, it will be the largest fresh market grocer in the central business district of Kuala Lumpur.

It will offer a wide range of groceries, household items, poultry products and fresh produce at reasonable prices.

In conjunction with its grand opening, NSK Grocer is having several promotions to bring even more savings to its customers.

These include free NSK Grocer membership for one year worth RM10, a free cash coupon worth RM10, and a large variety of products for sale at members' price.

NSK Grocer's operating hours are from 9am to 11pm daily.

The first retail outlet of NSK Grocer is located in Quill City Mall, Jalan Sultan Ismail, Kuala Lumpur.

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SARAWAK

Cultural festival may be held in Sibu after two-year gap

THE Borneo Cultural Festival (BCF) may make a comeback this year after being shelved since 2019 because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Sibu Municipal Council (SMC) chairman Clarence Ting, in his New Year message, said they hoped to stage the BCF this year along with several other annual activities on their event calendar if the pandemic situation improved.

BCF is a week-long celebration of food, music and dance showcasing the diverse cultural backgrounds of Sibu community, such as Iban, Bidayuh, Orang Ulu, Malay, Melanau and Chinese.

"I hope the pandemic will finally be under control this year even though the Omicron variant of Covid-19 is spreading worldwide.

"We have plans to upgrade several markets, including Rejang Park Market, Jaya Li Hua Market, Sungai Merah Market and the Central Market, while the temporary Tiong Hua wet market will open soon," he said.

Ting said the council could not do much last year because of movement restrictions.

"SMC in July started road expansion works at Jalan Igan, Jalan Wong King Huo at Aman roundabout and Lorong Aman 7, as well as the resurfacing of Jalan Pahlawan.

"The council also started work on Muhibbah Hawker Centre and the temporary Tiong Hua wet market," he said.

Ting said SMC faced many challenges, as many of its services were affected because of the pandemic.

He added that although many people were financially affected by the various movement control orders, the council still collected up to 93% of its targeted assessment fees last year.

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PROPERTIES

Houses for sale

AMPANG DATARAN Ukay 3sty corner, 54x65, 5r 4b, reno / exld, gated & guarded, near Ampang Point Mall RM1.5Mil. 012-3382238

BANDAR KLANG, Lrg Istana, (2 units shown), 2-storey terrace 5 rooms, 5 baths, RM550k per unit, 83x18sqft, Ms See 012-3800960 / Mr. See 019-3313366

BANDAR UTAMA Effingham 3sty corner b/glow l/a 6.5sf b/u 6.8sf, 6r6b RM5.6m neg. 012-239 0448 / 79551111 (REN 01399) E(1)1879

BANGSAR 2STY bungalow l/a 12000sf b/u 7000sf, 6+1r6b w swimming pool off RM7M neg. Batty 012-3322121 E(1)1692 E2574

BANGSAR PARK 3sty link 25x75 3rooms 2baths well kept. Call Huey 012-2300448 (REN 01399) 79551111 E(1)1879

BKT JELUTONG, dsd corner, l/a 4036sf, 5r4b, 6th, gated. Nicely reno & exld. RM4mil. Caroline 019-2129761 REN 02681 03-77266230 E(1)1632

DESA SETAPAK, Setapak 3sty terrace/link hse for sale. 861sf RM450k 3rooms nr LRT. 019-3514883 E(1)1537 PEA 2487

GROVE, SG Besi semi-d with pool for sale 4200sf lia 3750sf RM5.5m 4rooms p/t. 019-3514883 E(1)1537 PEA 2487

KLANG, TMN Malawis, single storey bungalow, 4r2b l/a 6000sf, 1th RM475K (ono) 012-2032553 REN3745 / E(3)1537

PETALING JAYA, freehold bungalow for sale, l/a 13500sf, b/u 5000sf, RM8.5mil neg. Call Bina 019-6668129 E(1)1800 REN 10442

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www.pj-bungalows.com

PJ SEC3, 4.5, 6, 8, 11 17,14,22 SS1 b/glows & semi-ds, basic to brand new avail. Call now for professional advice 0173234266 A. Ganesan REN10279 / 03-772 71699 E(3)0791 Universal

PJ SECTION 14, d/s b/glow, l/a 7000sf, b/u 4500sf, brand new, 7r 6b, ample parking, good location, RM5.45M ono spacious hse & flat land. Veron 019-2758224 REN 10278 / 03-7271699 E(3)0791

PJ SEK12 1sty s/glow l/a 8800sf, L/hold, quiet & green RM2.3mil. Don't miss. Contact 012-2242243 PEA1870 E(1)1492

PJ SS3, d/s s/d, l/a 3200sf, fully reno, 5r3b, freehold, guarded, RM 1.95m ono. Veron 019-2758224 REN1027/8 / 772/1699 E(3)0791

PUCHONG TMN Putra Prima 2sty link, 19x65, 3+1r3b, basic, urgent sale RM4xxk neg Call A Ganesan 017-3234266 REN10279/772716 99 E(3)0791 Universal Properties. www.pj-bungalows.com

SHAH ALAM, Sek11, land 20x82 4r3b, nice hse, long driveway, Bumi only. Selling price RM500K neg. 012-6547648 VE(1)0067/11

SUBANG JAYA SS17 RM850K 2sty link inter l/a 22x60 kitchen extended wide road frontage. Call 012-2242243 PEA1870 E(1)1492

TAMAN TUN d/s h/glow l/a 8000 sf, 6+6b with pool, fully reno. Priced value buy, urgent sale, RM3.55M neg. Veron 019-2758224 REN 10278 / 03-7727 1699 E(3)0791

TROPICANA D/STY semi-d 40x100, 4+1r4b, reno & well kept, RM2.6mil neg. Ruby 012-2390448 79551111 (REN 01399) E(1)1879

Houses Wanted

PROPRIMA ESTATES

TAMAN TUN TTDI link / semi-d / bungalow. Really Buyers! Proprima Estates. Call 012-3820128 E(3)1943

Houses To Let

MUTIARA D'SARA, PJ bungalow with pool for rent 8000sf lia 7000sf RM15k 6 rooms fully furnished. 019-3514883 E(1)1537 PEA 2487

Apartments For Sale

JALAN IPOH Menara Megah condo Block B, 6th flr, 1080sf 3r2b, kit sold, p/f, nr KL transit, RT, condo facilities RM330K. 013-7093638

KELANA PUTERI 1056sf 3r2b facing pool, wall-xspt, 1 car park, RM370k neg. Ruby 012-2390448 79551111 (REN 01399) E(1)1879

KL, KEPONG, Casa Prima Condo, 3r2b, 1100sf, Type C1, facilities RM308k (ono) 012-2032553 REN 3745 / E(3)1537

MIDFIELDS 2, Sg Besi condominium new unit for sale, 1111sf RM600k facing KLCC. 019-3514883 E(1)1537 PEA 2487

THE BOULEVARD, Subang Jaya condo 1227sf 3rooms, 2+1b p/f good location RM488k. 012-3718908 E(3)1444 REN 00351

BEST PRICE!

TWINS, DAMANSARA Heights condo for sale 2078sf RM1.5m 5rooms fully furnished. 019-3514883 E(1)1537 PEA 2487

USJ GOODYEAR Court 6, 3r2b 960sf, near LRT station, Freehold, RM298K (ono) 012-2032553 REN3745 E(3)1537

Apartments To Let

28 DUTAMAS, Dutamas penthouse condo for rent 2468sf RM5k 4rooms fully furnished. 019-3514883 E(1)1537 PEA 2487

BANGSAR ONE Menerung 3+1r p/f RM12k (sale also) s/r p/f RM14/ 18k / Serai 5r p/f / Gaya / Suasana Bangsar. 019-3864122 E(3)0043

Shops For Sale

DAMANSARA UTAMA Uptown 2 adjoining 4sty face outlet road RM3.5M up. each 019-3308923 E(3)1191

DATARAN SUNWAY PJU 3sty shop, 1th, 22x75, same row with Maybank. Hot location!! RM3.65M 012-3770380 Ren08647 E(3)1871

KEPONG 2STY face main road freehold tenanted opposite KFC, Hong Leong bank RM1.5M. 017-5995092 REN07021 E(2)1064

KL DESA Pandan 3sty shop, 22x70, under market price, Hot loc facing main rd, near Bank & McD, High ROI RM2.68mil only! 012-3770380 Ren08647 E(3)1871

KL GOMBAK 3sty freehold face main road solid tenant 5% ROI RM1.85M 100% occupancy. 0173995092 REN07021 E(2)1064

KL GOMBAK 4sty main road freehold nr bank beside pasar tenanted 5.5% ROI RM2.35M 0173995092 REN07021 E(2)1064

KL IMBI 2sty corner lot l/a 1740sf freehold very good exposure. Don't miss. Kevin 012-2242243 PEA 1870 E(1)1492

KL IMBI 4sty freehold, 24'x80' near Lot 10 / TRX. Don't miss. Contact Kevin 012-2242243 PEA1870 E(1)1492

KL TUNKU Abdul Rahmim, 9sty shoplot l/a 3873sqft b/u 34ksqft, corner 5ft facing mainroad prime loc Nicole 012-2032872 E(1)1525

KL YULEK 2sty 1fr nr pasar heavy traffic tenanted good income self RM2.35M 0173995092 REN07021 E(2)1064

KUCHAI 1STY RM1.48M 2sty or RM2.5M tenanted good income super busy area. 0173995092 REN07021 E(2)1064

MIDFIELDS SQUARE, Sg Besi 3sty shop lot for sale 5002sf RM1.98m 5mins to Bandar Tun Razak. 019-3514883 E(1)1537 PEA 2487

ONE PUCHONG 6fr 3sty + 1 basement reno matured surrounding cap ROI Mall RM1.3mil. Fox 012-3736043 Ren10001 E(1)1197

PJ SS2 2sty shop, intermediate, l/a 22'x75', freehold, near LRT station, tenanted. Call 012-2242243 PEA1870 E(1)1492

PJ SS2 1fr 25x75 very busy tenanted good income sell RM2.55M One & only 0173995092 REN07021 E(2)1064

PUCHONG 2STY face main road solid tenant 5% ROI freehold sell RM1.85M. 0173995092 REN07021 E(2)1064

SEMENYIH 2STY main road big company tenanted freehold beside supermarket RM800K. 0173995092 REN07021 E(2)1064

Shops Wanted

PROPRIMA ESTATES

KL PJ shoplots / land. Ready buyers! Proprima Estates. Call 012-3820128 E(3)1943

Shops To Let

SEREMBAN TERMINAL (LGS)/ for rent, BU:1800sf Rental: RM5k p/mth Mr Ong 017-3683039 REN 00408 VE(1)0065(3)

TAMAN TUN gr 1st 2nd floors main road good exposure for business 019-3309922 E(3)1191 RMnog

TTDI PLAZA ground floor near Hero Mart MRT RM7,500 neg 019-3309922 E(3)1191

Factories For Sale

INDUSTRIAL PARK Subang Jaya, 0/hold, factory, for sale, 1.6 acres, RM3mil neg. Call Bina 019-6668129 E(1)1800 REN 10442

Factories To Let

BB TECHNO Industrial Park / Batang Berjuntai 1sty (20' x 80') Call 03-5046 2828 (O)

KAJANG JLN Kapar l&secs b/u 140ksf & Telok Panglima Garang la2.5ac su60ksf both high ceiling CF. 012-2210138 VE(3)0357

KJ TECHNO Industrial Park / Kg Jawa 1.5sty (25' x 80' / 30' x 90') Call 03-4045 2828 (O)

SHAH ALAM Bukit Kemuning (2400sf- 2 detached units for rent together) and 25000sf unit for rent. Call 012-2271309 / 012-9714720

Warehouse For Sale

PORT KLANG warehouse for sale. Land 8 acres, b/u 140,000sf RM35 million. Call 012-3939902 (PEA1452) E(1)1879

Land For Sale

BALING, KEDAH approx 27acre industrial status land with 60 tons capacity oil palm mill (incomplete) and 172ac oil palm est. together selling below market value. 012-3162424 E(1)1855\ PEA 1308

BANDAR BOTANIC Klang, 1 acre commercial, HQ / showroom, 0hold, RM230 psf. 012-3939902 (PEA1452) E(1)1879

BANDAR PUNCAK Hlam 2.8 acres frontage main road industrial land RM8psf good accessibility 017-2536537 E(1)1448 PEA 2827

BENTONG OLD Bypass 7.7 acres 1fr agri nice terrain, planted w/ durians & fruits, rivers front & back. Urgent 019-319 1331 (E1713) E(3)0788

BENTONG, PAHANG agriculture land natural rain forest RM298k. Owner welcome to list. 012-2986308 E(1)1670/5 REN 17803

GOMBAK KL, Jalan Sg. Mulia zone residential, prime location, excellent access, l/h, 6 acres, RM11.8psf (ono) (Malay Reserve) 012-2032553 REN3745 E(3)1537

JALAN IPOH KL 1fr zoning commercial land for sale. L/a: 1.28 acres Flat land. Beside MRT station. Very good location for shop / service apart/ showroom/etc Call Joyce 016-2196088 REN02725 77286230 E(1)0452

KL NEARBY 3(2) acres jungle home in city prime loc easy access for develop RM60 psf neg 012-3736043 R10001 E(1)1197

KLANG, JOHAN Setia 2ac agri land at RM1.4M good for invest. High potential for future dev. surrounded by UM, Gamuda, Tropicana and LRT 3. Exist Hway KESAS, SKVE & WCE. 012-3162424 E(1)1855\ PEA 1308

KLANG, SLANGKING 2ac agri land at RM1.5M good for invest. High potential for future development, surrounded by UM, Gamuda, Tropicana & LRT 3, exist highway KESAS, SKVE & WCE. 012-3162424 E(1)1855\ PEA 1308

KULAIJAYA, JOHOR for sale 6ac freehold and at RM5.8M potential industry lot, facing main rd & accessible from highway. Below market value. 012-3162424 E(1)1855/1 PEA 1308

Land For Sale

MELAKA DURIAN Tunggal close to town. Agri lot but potential for housing use, along main road. Land: 1.968 acres, Freehold. Sale price: RM1.6m nego. Call Mr Ong 017-3883038 REN 00408 VE(1)0065(3)

Pahang 5 acre RM900k, 1fr oil palm, water, electricity ,4 ton per month REN21134 017-373 5408E(1)1583

PJ KAYU Ara residential land 1 ac + dev 55 units townhse matured surrounding tenanted. RM9.5mil. 012-3736043 R10001 E(1)1197

Rooms To Let

PJ KELANA Jaya 2sty semi-d bungalow for ladies only. Rent RM550 to RM650 per month. Call 018-3160900 E(3)1841

AUTO

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NISSAN ALMERA 1.5 Auto 2013, 1 owner, low km, black colour, clean, nice condition, RM24.5K. Yunus 012-3170865/019-3436293

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Court Notices

DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI KUALA LUMPUR
DALAM NEGERI KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA
PENGGULUNGAN SYARIKAT NO : WA-28HCC-915-12/2021

Dalam perkara Seksyen 465 (1)(a) dibaca bersama 465 (1)(e) Akta Syarikat 2016

Dan

Dalam Perkara Kaedah-kaedah Penggulungan Syarikat 1972

Dan

Dalam perkara **SEALION HOTEL SDN. BHD. (NO SYARIKAT: 200801017856 / 819152-A)**

ANTARA

IMEJ TENGGARA SDN. BHD.
(NO. SYARIKAT: 200701005227 / 783226-V) ...PEMPETISYEN

DAN

SEALION HOTEL SDN. BHD.
(NO. SYARIKAT: 200801017856 / 819152-A) ...RESPONDEN

IKLAN PETISYEN

NOTIS ADALAH DENGAN INI DIBERI bahawa suatu Petisyen untuk penggulungan Syarikat yang dinamakan di atas telah Mahkamah Tinggi telah pada 15hb Disember, 2021 dikemukakan oleh **IMEJ TENGGARA SDN. BHD.**

DAN bahawa Petisyen tersebut ditetapkan supaya dibicarakan di hadapan Mahkamah yang bersidang di Mahkamah Tinggi Kuala Lumpur, Kompleks Mahkamah Kuala Lumpur, Jalan Tuanku Abdul Halim (Jalan Duta), 50606 Kuala Lumpur pada **12hb April, 2022.**

DAN mana-mana pihak yang bercadang atau penyokong Petisyen tersebut yang ingin menyokong atau menentang sesuatu perintah mengikut Petisyen tersebut boleh hadir dengan tujuan itu secara peribadi atau melalui peguambelanya pada masa perbicaraan. Salinan Petisyen tersebut akan ditekalkan oleh pihak yang bertandatangan di bawah ini kepada mana-mana pemiutang atau penyumbang Syarikat tersebut yang memintanya dengan membuat bayaran yang ditetapkan.

Alamat Pempetisyen adalah di Suite 601 & Suite 602, 6th Floor, Bangunan Ang, Taman Tasek, 80200 Johor Bahru, Johor.

Peguamcara Pempetisyen ialah Tetuan Dennis Nik & Wong yang beralamat di Suite 601-602, Level 6, Bangunan ANG, No. 1, Jalan Jerami, Taman Tasek, 80200 Johor Bahru, Johor.

Bertarikh pada 30hb Disember, 2021

t/t

DENNIS NIK & WONG
Peguamcara bagi Pihak Pempetisyen

PERINGATAN:

Sesiapa yang ingin hadir pada perbicaraan Petisyen tersebut hendaklah memyampaikan, atau menghantar dengan pos, kepada Tetuan Dennis Nik & Wong, peguambela dan peguamcara di atas, notis bertulis tentang niatnya sebegitu. Notis tersebut mestilah menyatakan nama dan alamat pihak berkenaan, atau jika ia sebuah firma, nama dan alamat firma, dan mestilah ditandatangan oleh pihak atau firma berkenaan atau peguamcaranya, jika ada. Notis hendaklah disampaikan, atau jika dihantar dengan pos, hendaklah dihantar dalam jangkamasa mencukupi supaya sampai kepada pihak yang dinamakan di atas sebelum pukul 12 tengahari pada 11hb April, 2022.

Notis Pengikatan ini dikeluarkan oleh Tetuan Dennis Nik & Wong beralamat di Suite 601-602, Level 6, Bangunan ANG, No. 1, Jalan Jerami, Taman Tasek, 80200 Johor Bahru, Johor. Peguamcara bagi Pempetisyen di atas.
(Ruj. Kami: LLM/liya/GL2934)

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT SEREMBAN
IN THE STATE OF NEGERI SEMBILAN, MALAYSIA
COMPANIES (WINDING UP) NO. NA-28NCC-41-12/2021

In the matter of The Companies Act 2016
And
In the matter of section 465(1)(c) of the Companies Act 2016
And
In the matter of section 466(1)(a) of the Companies Act 2016
And
In the matter of Solar Universe Rubber Sdn. Bhd.
(Company No. 201301001442 (1031279-K))
BETWEEN

RZS INVEST FZE
(Company No.: RAKFTZA-FZE-4010696) ...PETITIONER

AND

SOLAR UNIVERSE RUBBER SDN. BHD.
(Company No.: 201301001442 (1031279-K)) ...RESPONDENT

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

NOTICE is hereby given that a Petition for the winding-up of SOLAR UNIVERSE RUBBER SDN. BHD. (Company No. 201301001442 (1031279-K)) by the High Court was, on the 14th day of December 2021, presented by the Petitioner, RZS INVEST FZE (Company No.: RAKFTZA-FZE-4010696) and that the said Petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at the High Court of Malaya at Seremban at 9.00 o'clock in the morning, on the **28th day of January 2022**, and any creditor or contributory of the Respondent desiring to support or oppose the making of an order on the said Petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his counsel for that purpose; and a copy of the Petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributory of the said Company requiring the same by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

The Petitioner's address is at No.51, Jalan Utama, 70490 George Town, Pulau Pinang.

The Petitioner's solicitors is **Messrs. LOW & PARTNERS** of No. 233-1, Jalan 87 BTC, Uptown Avenue, Seremban 2, 70300 Seremban, Negeri Sembilan.

Dated the 29th day of December 2021.

t/t

Messrs. Low & Partners
For and on behalf of the Petitioner

NOTE:-
Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition must serve on or send by post to the abovenamed solicitors, **Messrs. Low & Partners**, notice in writing of his intention so to do. The notice must state the name and address of the person, or if a firm, the name and address of the firm and must be signed by the person or firm, or his or their solicitor (if any) and must be served, or, if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the abovenamed solicitors not later than **12.00 o'clock noon on Wednesday, 26th January 2022.**

THE ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION is filed by Messrs. Low & Partners of No. 233-1, Jalan 87 BTC, Uptown Avenue, Seremban 2, 70300 Seremban, Negeri Sembilan.
Tel: 06-6012293 Fax: 06-6013298 Email: hee@lowpartners.com.my
Ref: LPS/CP/9618/11/2021/LSE

DALAM MAHKAMAH MAJISTRET DI JOHOR BAHRU
DJAMAN SIVIL NO.: JA-A72NCC-822-11/2021

ANTARA

SME POWER SYSTEM SDN BHD
(NO. SYARIKAT: 201501032553 (1203874-W)) ...PLAINTIF

DAN

LYE KOK HONG
(NO. K/P: 640410-01-5199)
BERBAGA SEBAGAI "U-SHI POWER ENGINEERING" (NO. PENDAFTARAN PERNIAGAAN: 200703172047 (007112890-V)" ...DEFENDAN

PENYAMPAIAN GANTI-BENTUK IKLAN

Kepada:-

LYE KOK HONG (NO. K/P: 640410-01-5199)
T/A U-SHI POWER ENGINEERING
No. 61, Jalan Teratai 7
Taman Johor Jaya
81100 Johor Bahru, Johor
Dan/atau
LYE KOK HONG (NO. K/P: 640410-01-5199)
T/A U-SHI POWER ENGINEERING
No. 14, Jalan Danau 2b
Taman Desa Jaya
81100 Johor Bahru, Johor

AMBIL PERHATIAN BAHAWA suatu tindakan Writ dan Penyataan Tuntutan telah dimulakan terhadap kamu di Mahkamah Majistret Johor Bahru di dalam sistem Queen's Suit No. JA-A72NCC-822-11/2021 oleh SME Power System Sdn Bhd beralamat di No. 2, Jalan Solistar 3/2, Taman Perindustrian Ringan Pulai, 81300 Skudai, Johor yang mana tuntutan Plaintif oleh untuk jumlah sebanyak **RM27,678.70** berserta faedah pada kadar 5% setahun ke atas jumlah yang tertunggak dari tarikh Penyataan Tuntutan ini sehingga tarikh pembayaran dan penyelesaian sepenuhnya bersama kos tindakan ini.

DAN TELAH DIPERINTAHKAN bahawa penyampaian Writ dan Penyataan Tuntutan kepada kamu adalah dengan menampelkan Writ dan Penyataan Tuntutan dan Perintah yang dibuat ini di Papan Kenyataan Mahkamah Majistret Johor Bahru dan mengiklankannya di dalam akhbar "THE STAR" yang diterbitkan di seluruh negara dan diseimbangkan bahawa penyampaian secara penampelan dan pengiklanan tersebut adalah sempurna dan berkesan untuk Writ dan Penyataan Tuntutan kepada kamu selepas empat belas (14) hari selepas tarikh tersebut penampelan dan pengiklanan tersebut.

Jika kamu berhasrat untuk membela tindakan tersebut kamu mestilah hadir sama ada secara sendiri atau melalui peguambela kamu di hadapan Mahkamah Majistret di Johor Bahru pada **27.01.2022** pada pukul **9.00 pagi**. Jika kamu ingkar untuk berbuat sedemikian, perbicaraan boleh diberikan temadap kamu.

Bertarikh pada 30hb Disember, 2021

t/t

DENNIS NIK & WONG
Peguamcara bagi Plaintif

Penyampaian Ganti-Bentuk Iklan ini dikeluarkan oleh Tetuan Dennis Nik & Wong beralamat di Suite 601-602, Level 6, Bangunan ANG, No. 1, Jalan Jerami, Taman Tasek, 80200 Johor Bahru, Johor. Peguamcara bagi Plaintif di atas.
(Ruj. Kami: LLM/liya/GL5501)

DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI TAIPING DALAM NEGERI PERAK DARUL RIDZUAN
MALAYSIA PETISYEN
PERCERAIAN NO : A8-33-60-11/2021

Dalam Perkara Seksyen 58 dan 54 (1)(d) & 68 Akta Membaharui Undang-Undang (Perkahwinan & Perceraian) 1976

ANTARA

UMA DEVI A/P SEVATHIAN (P)
PEMPETISYEN
(NO K/P.: 811007-08-6614)

DAN

MANI A/L KRISHNAN(L)
RESPONDEN
(NO K/P.: 800415-08-5567)

NOTIS

Kepada

Mani a/l Krishnan
C-G-4, Flat Sri Conelly, Jalan
Pasir Puteh, 31650 Ipoh, Perak
Darul Ridzuan.

AMBIL PERHATIAN bahawa satu tindakan telah dimulakan terhadap kamu di Mahkamah Tinggi Malaya di Taiping melalui Petisyen Perceraian No. A8-33-60-11/2021 oleh Pempetisyen yang dinamakan di atas. Mahkamah telah memerintahkan bahawa suapan Petisyen Perceraian dikemukakan kepada kamu melalui Penyampaian Ganti dengan menampalkan salinan Petisyen Perceraian yang bertarikh 20 Oktober 2021 tersebut pada Papan Notis Mahkamah Tinggi Malaya di Taiping bersama dengan Perintah Untuk Penyampaian Ganti yang menyatakan di akhir tempatan "The Star" dan bahawa penampalan dan pengiklanan sedemikian dianggap sebagai penyampaian sempurna dan cukup akan Petisyen Perceraian ke atas kamu selepas empat belas (14) hari dari tarikh akan penampalan dan pengiklanan tersebut.

Kamu dikehendaki untuk hadir di Mahkamah Tinggi Malaya di Taiping bersama dengan Peminat Untuk Penyampaian Ganti yang menyatakan di akhir tempatan "The Star" dan bahawa penampalan dan pengiklanan sedemikian dianggap sebagai penyampaian sempurna dan cukup akan Petisyen Perceraian ke atas kamu selepas empat belas (14) hari dari tarikh akan penampalan dan pengiklanan tersebut.

Jika kamu gagal berbuat demikian satu Perintah Perceraian boleh dibuat terhadap kamu.

Notis Kebankrapan ini boleh dipehatikan oleh kamu atau pemimpinan di Mahkamah ini.

Bertarikh 7 Disember 2021

-dtandatangani-

Pemelong Kanan Pendaftar
Mahkamah Tinggi Malaya
Shah Alam

NOTIS IKLAN ini ditalikan bagi pihak Pemulong Penghakiman oleh Tetuan Sidek Ikram Yong & Dennis, Peguamcara bagi pihak Pemulong Penghakiman yang beralamat di Tingkat 16, Menara Bumiputra-Commerce, No 11, Jalan Raja Laut, 50350 Kuala Lumpur. (Ruj.: E2636.0310130421JCS/TMH-sz-sg)

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT SHAH ALAM
IN THE STATE OF SELANGOR DARUL EHSAN
(COMMERCIAL DIVISION)
COMPANIES WINDING UP NO: BA-28NCC-652-12/2021

In the matter of Section 465(1)(a) of the Companies Act 2016
And
In the matter of Persai Drilling Sdn Bhd
(Registration No.: 200601012808) (Company No: 732557-V)
BETWEEN

PERISAI DRILLING SDN BHD
(REGISTRATION NO.: 200601012808)
(COMPANY NO: 732557-V) ...PETITIONER

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

NOTICE is hereby given that a Petition for the Winding-Up of Perisai Drilling Sdn Bhd by the High Court was on the 6th day of December 2021 presented to the said Court by **PERISAI DRILLING SDN BHD** of 12th Floor, Menara Symphony, No 5, Jalan Professor Khoo Kay Kim, Seksyen 13, 46200 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan. And that the said Petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at **Shah Alam** on the **9th March 2022** at 9.00 a.m. and any creditor or contributory of the said company desiring to support or oppose the making of an Order on the said Petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his Counsel for that purpose and a copy of the Petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributory of the said company requiring the same by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

The Petitioner's solicitors are Messrs Shamrizal Rashid & Lee whose address for service is at Ground & First Floor, Wisma Prima, No. 17, Jalan Sri Semenchor Satu, Damansara Heights, 50490 Kuala Lumpur.

Dated this 30th day of December 2021

Sgd.

MESSRS SHAHRIZAT RASHID & LEE
Solicitors for the Petitioner

NOTE:Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition must serve on or send by post to the abovenamed Solicitors, Messrs Shamrizal Rashid & Lee notice in writing of his intention so to do. The Notice must state the name and address of the person, or if a firm, the name and address of the firm and must be signed by the person of firm or his or their solicitor (if any) and must be served or if posted must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the abovenamed not later than 12 noon of the 8th March 2022.
Ref : HKXY/PDSB/095/21m (001657)
362465_1

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR
(COMMERCIAL DIVISION)
PETITION NO. : WA – 28NCC – 22 – 10/2021

In the matter of HYUNDAI-SIME DARBY BERHAD
(Company No.: 67617 – M) ("Company");
And
In the matter of Article 46(4) of the Articles of Association of the Company;
And
In the matter of Rule 15 of the Constitution of the Company;
And
In the matter of a petition to reduce the share capital of the Company pursuant to Section 115(a) and Section 116 of the Companies Act 2016;
And
In the matter of Order 89 of the Rules of Court 2012 and the Companies (Reduction of Capital) Rules 1972.

HYUNDAI-SIME DARBY BERHAD
(Company No.: 67617 – M) ...PETITIONER

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that a Petition was on the 26th day of October 2021 presented to the High Court, Kuala Lumpur for the confirmation of the reduction in the paid-up share capital of RM182,608,700 by cancelling 182,608,700 ordinary shares and to return the excess issued and paid-up capital totalling RM182,608,700 to Sime Darby Motors Sdn Bhd, being the sole member of the Company.

AND NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN THAT the said Petition is directed to be heard via Zoom before the High Court at Kuala Lumpur on the **14th day of January 2022** at 9.00 a.m.

Any creditor or shareholder of the said Company desiring to oppose the making of an Order to the confirmation of the said reduction of capital should appear at the said time of hearing in person or by Counsel for that purpose.

A copy of the said Petition will be furnished to any such person requiring the same by the under mentioned solicitors on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

The Petitioner's solicitors are Messrs Skrine, Unit No. 50-8-1, 8th Floor, Wisma UOA Damansara, 50, Jalan Dungun, Damansara Heights, 50490 Kuala Lumpur.

Sgd.
Messrs Skrine,
Solicitors for the Petitioner

NOTE :-
Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition must serve on or send by post to the abovenamed Skrine, notice in writing of his intention to do so. The Notice must state the name and address of the person, or if a firm, the name and address of the firm, and must be signed by the person or firm, or his or their Solicitors (if any) and must be served, or if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the abovenamed not later than twelve o'clock noon of the 12th day of January 2022.
(vcelots/saiesh/suresh2/capital reduction/HSDB/Not-adv-STAR)

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR
(COMMERCIAL DIVISION)
PETITION NO. : WA – 28NCC – 24 – 10/2021

In the matter of SIME DARBY HOLIDAY HOMES SDN BHD
(Company No.: 386726 – K) ("Company");
And
In the matter of Rule 16 of the Constitution of the Company;
And
In the matter of a petition to reduce the share capital of the Company pursuant to Section 115(a) and Section 116 of the Companies Act 2016;
And
In the matter of Order 89 of the Rules of Court 2012 and the Companies (Reduction of Capital) Rules 1972.

SIME DARBY HOLIDAY HOMES SDN BHD
(Company No.: 288724 – K) ...PETITIONER

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that a Petition was on the 25th day of October 2021 presented to the High Court, Kuala Lumpur for the confirmation of the reduction in the paid-up share capital of RM6,553,541 by cancelling 4,441,400 ordinary shares and to return the excess issued and paid-up capital totalling RM6,553,541 by way of an inter-company set-off to Sime Darby Holdings Berhad, being the sole member of the Company.

AND NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN THAT the said Petition is directed to be heard via Zoom before the High Court at Kuala Lumpur on the **14th day of January 2022** at 9.00 a.m.

Any creditor or shareholder of the said Company desiring to oppose the making of an Order to the confirmation of the said reduction of capital should appear at the said time of hearing in person or by Counsel for that purpose.

A copy of the said Petition will be furnished to any such person requiring the same by the under mentioned solicitors on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

The Petitioner's solicitors are Messrs Skrine, Unit No. 50-8-1, 8th Floor, Wisma UOA Damansara, 50, Jalan Dungun, Damansara Heights, 50490 Kuala Lumpur.

Sgd.
Messrs Skrine,
Solicitors for the Petitioner

NOTE :-
Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition must serve on or send by post to the abovenamed Skrine, notice in writing of his intention to do so. The Notice must state the name and address of the person, or if a firm, the name and address of the firm, and must be signed by the person or firm, or his or their Solicitors (if any) and must be served, or if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the abovenamed not later than twelve o'clock noon of the 12th day of January 2022.
(vcelots/saiesh/suresh2/capital reduction/SDHH/Not-adv-STAR)

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR
(COMMERCIAL DIVISION)
COMPANIES (WINDING-UP) NO. WA - 28NCC - 822 - 11/2021

In the matter of Section 131 of the Labuan Companies Act 1990 and Section 465(1)(e) of the Companies Act 2016
And
In the matter of Companies (Winding-Up) Rules 1972
BETWEEN

VOVIDA Fast Pay Limited
(Company No. 12095666) ...Petitioner

AND

Telcom Trader Limited
(Company No. LL11252) ...Respondent

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

Notice is hereby given that a Petition for the Winding-Up of Telcom Trader Limited (Company No. LL11252) ("Company") by the High Court, was on the 15th day of November 2021 presented by VOVIDA Fast Pay Limited of Interpark House, 7 Down Street, London, W1J 7AJ, United Kingdom. And that the said Petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at Kuala Lumpur at 9.00 o'clock in the forenoon, on the 16th day of March 2022; and any creditor or contributory of the said Company desiring to support or oppose the making of an Order on the said Petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his Counsel for that purpose; and a copy of the said Petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributory of the said Company requiring the same by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

Interested parties are required to submit their offers in a sealed envelope marked "**ATPOM Offer/2022**". All written offers must be accompanied with 5% of the offer price as earnest money in the form of bank draft made payable to "**SC CORPORATE RECOVERY SDN BHD**" and must be delivered to the following address below:-

The Receiver and Manager
c/o SC CORPORATE RECOVERY SDN. BHD.
(Co No. 558569-D)
No. 59, Jalan Thampipitai, Brickfields,
50470 Kuala Lumpur

Closing date for offer submission is before
5.00 pm on 27th January 2022.

For further details and inspection arrangements, please call Ms Anilaa at 03-2272 2939/37.

The Receiver and Manager is not bound to accept the highest or any offer.

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR
(COMMERCIAL DIVISION)
COMPANIES (WINDING-UP) NO. WA - 28NCC - 922 - 12/2021

In the Matter of Sections 465(1)(e) and 466(1) of the Companies Act, 2016.
And
In the Matter of MZ Worldwide Sdn Bhd. (Company No. 201801028451 (1290477-T))
Between

CKL Packaging Sdn Bhd ...Petitioner
(Company No. 201501026351 (1282370-U))
And

MZ Worldwide Sdn Bhd
(Company No. 201801028451 (1290477-T)) ...Respondent

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

NOTICE is hereby given that a Petition for the winding-up of the above-named company by the High Court was on the 20 December 2021 presented by CKL Packaging Sdn Bhd And that the said Petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at Kuala Lumpur at 9.30 a.m. in the forenoon on Tuesday the **12th April 2022**; and any creditor or contributory of the said company desiring to support or oppose the making of an order on the said Petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his counsel for that purpose; and a copy of the Petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributory of the said company requiring the same by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

The Petitioner's address is at No. 8, Jalan Hi Tech 6/3, Kawasan Perindustrian Hi Tech, 43500 Semenyih, Selangor Darul Ehsan.

The Petitioner's Solicitors is Messrs Soon Eng Thye & Co. Advocates & Solicitors of Suite 9-16, 9th Floor, Wisma UOA II, No. 21, Jalan Pinang, 50450 Kuala Lumpur.

Dated the 28th day of December 2021.

SOON ENG THYE & CO.
Petitioner's Solicitors

Note:
Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition must serve on or send by post to the abovenamed Solicitors, Messrs. Soon Eng Thye & Co., notice in writing of his intention so to do. The notice must state the name and the address of the person, or, if a firm, the name and address of the firm, or his or their Solicitors (if any) and must be served, or, if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the abovenamed not later than twelve o'clock noon of the 11th day of April 2022.
Tel No. 03-21666285 Fax No. 03-21654680 (SET/10621/A)

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR
(COMMERCIAL DIVISION)
COMPANIES (WINDING-UP) NO. WA - 28NCC - 822 - 11/2021

In the matter of Section 131 of the Labuan Companies Act 1990 and Section 465(1)(e) of the Companies Act 2016
And
In the matter of Companies (Winding-Up) Rules 1972
BETWEEN

CKL Packaging Sdn Bhd ...Petitioner
(Company No. 201501026351 (1282370-U))
And

MZ Worldwide Sdn Bhd
(Company No. 201801028451 (1290477-T)) ...Respondent

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

NOTICE is hereby given that a Petition for the winding-up of the above-named company by the High Court was on the 20 December 2021 presented by CKL Packaging Sdn Bhd And that the said Petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at Kuala Lumpur at 9.30 a.m. in the forenoon on Tuesday the **12th April 2022**; and any creditor or contributory of the said company desiring to support or oppose the making of an order on the said Petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his counsel for that purpose; and a copy of the Petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributory of the said company requiring the same by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

The Petitioner's address is at No. 8, Jalan Hi Tech 6/3, Kawasan Perindustrian Hi Tech, 43500 Semenyih, Selangor Darul Ehsan.

The Petitioner's Solicitors is Messrs Soon Eng Thye & Co. Advocates & Solicitors of Suite 9-16, 9th Floor, Wisma UOA II, No. 21, Jalan Pinang, 50450 Kuala Lumpur.

Dated the 28th day of December 2021.

SOON ENG THYE & CO.
Petitioner's Solicitors

Note:
Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition must serve on or send by post to the abovenamed Solicitors, Messrs. Soon Eng Thye & Co., notice in writing of his intention so to do. The notice must state the name and the address of the person, or, if a firm, the name and address of the firm, or his or their Solicitors (if any) and must be served, or, if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the abovenamed not later than twelve o'clock noon of the 11th day of April 2022.
Tel No. 03-21666285 Fax No. 03-21654680 (SET/10621/A)

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR
(COMMERCIAL DIVISION)
COMPANIES (WINDING-UP) NO. WA - 28NCC - 922 - 12/2021

In the Matter of Sections 465(1)(e) and 466(1) of the Companies Act, 2016.
And
In the Matter of MZ Worldwide Sdn Bhd. (Company No. 201801028451 (1290477-T))
Between

CKL Packaging Sdn Bhd ...Petitioner
(Company No. 201501026351 (1282370-U))
And

MZ Worldwide Sdn Bhd
(Company No. 201801028451 (1290477-T)) ...Respondent

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

NOTICE is hereby given that a Petition for the winding-up of the above-named company by the High Court was on the 20 December 2021 presented by CKL Packaging Sdn Bhd And that the said Petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at Kuala Lumpur at 9.30 a.m. in the forenoon on Tuesday the **12th April 2022**; and any creditor or contributory of the said company desiring to support or oppose the making of an order on the said Petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his counsel for that purpose; and a copy of the Petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributory of the said company requiring the same by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

The Petitioner's address is at No. 8, Jalan Hi Tech 6/3, Kawasan Perindustrian Hi Tech, 43500 Semenyih, Selangor Darul Ehsan.

The Petitioner's Solicitors is Messrs Soon Eng Thye & Co. Advocates & Solicitors of Suite 9-16, 9th Floor, Wisma UOA II, No. 21, Jalan Pinang, 50450 Kuala Lumpur.

Dated the 28th day of December 2021.

SOON ENG THYE & CO.
Petitioner's Solicitors

Note:
Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition must serve on or send by post to the abovenamed Solicitors, Messrs. Soon Eng Thye & Co., notice in writing of his intention so to do. The notice must state the name and the address of the person, or, if a firm, the name and address of the firm, or his or their Solicitors (if any) and must be served, or, if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the abovenamed not later than twelve o'clock noon of the 11th day of April 2022.
Tel No. 03-21666285 Fax No. 03-21654680 (SET/10621/A)

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR
(COMMERCIAL DIVISION)
COMPANIES (WINDING-UP) NO. WA - 28NCC - 922 - 12/2021

In the Matter of Sections 465(1)(e) and 466(1) of the Companies Act, 2016.
And
In the Matter of MZ Worldwide Sdn Bhd. (Company No. 201801028451 (1290477-T))
Between

CKL Packaging Sdn Bhd ...Petitioner
(Company No. 201501026351 (1282370-U))
And

MZ Worldwide Sdn Bhd
(Company No. 201801028451 (1290477-T)) ...Respondent

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

NOTICE is hereby given that a Petition for the winding-up of the above-named company by the High Court was on the 20 December 2021 presented by CKL Packaging Sdn Bhd And that the said Petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at Kuala Lumpur at 9.30 a.m. in the forenoon on Tuesday the **12th April 2022**; and any creditor or contributory of the said company desiring to support or oppose the making of an order on the said Petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his counsel for that purpose; and a copy of the Petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributory of the said company requiring the same by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

The Petitioner's address is at No. 8, Jalan Hi Tech 6/3, Kawasan Perindustrian Hi Tech, 43500 Semenyih, Selangor Darul Ehsan.

The Petitioner's Solicitors is Messrs Soon Eng Thye & Co. Advocates & Solicitors of Suite 9-16, 9th Floor, Wisma UOA II, No. 21, Jalan Pinang, 50450 Kuala Lumpur.

Dated the 28th day of December 2021.

SOON ENG THYE & CO.
Petitioner's Solicitors

Note:
Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition must serve on or send by post to the abovenamed Solicitors, Messrs. Soon Eng Thye & Co., notice in writing of his intention so to do. The notice must state the name and the address of the person, or, if a firm, the name and address of the firm, or his or their Solicitors (if any) and must be served, or, if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the abovenamed not later than twelve o'clock noon of the 11th day of April 2022.
Tel No. 03-21666285 Fax No. 03-21654680 (SET/10621/A)

DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI SHAH ALAM
DALAM NEGERI SELANGOR DARUL EHSAN
DALAM KEBANKRAPAN NO : BA-29NCC-2165-10/2021

BER : CHAN CHUEN POOI ...PENGHUTANG
(NO. K/P: 680818-10-5040)
EX-PARTE: CIMB ISLAMIC BANK BERHAD ...PEMIUTANG
(NO. SYARIKAT: 200401032872 (671380-H)) PENGHAKIMAN

NOTIS IKLAN

Kepada :-

CHAN CHUEN POOI
D-13-1, Garden Park Condo
Sg Long
43000 Kajang
Selangor Darul Ehsan
Dan
CHAN CHUEN POOI
No. 18, Jalan S/L 7/4
Bandar Sungai Long,
Batu 11 ¼ Cheras
43200 Kajang
Selangor Darul Ehsan

AMBIL PERHATIAN bahawa suatu Notis Kebankrapan dikeluarkan terhadap kamu oleh Mahkamah Tinggi Shah Alam oleh CIMB ISLAMIC BANK BERHAD (No. Syarikat : 200401032872 (671380-H)) yang mempunyai alamat di Level 23A, Menara CIMB, No. 1, Jalan Stesen Sentral 2, 50470 Kuala Lumpur dan Mahkamah telah memerintahkan bahawa Notis Kebankrapan tersebut dikeluarkan kepada kamu secara Penyampaian Ganti dengan menampalkan sesalinan Notis Kebankrapan tersebut berserta sesalinan Perintah Penyampaian Ganti di alamat terakhir kamu yang diketahui iaitu di D-13-1, Garden Park Condo, Sg Long, 43000 Kajang Selangor Darul Ehsan dan di No. 18, Jalan S/L 7/4, Bandar Sungai Long, Batu 11 ¼ Cheras, 43200 Kajang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, menampalkannya di papan kenyataan Mahkamah Tinggi Shah Alam serta mengiklankan satu Notis secara di dalam surat khabar harian "The Star" dan penampalan dan pengiklanan tersebut adalah dianggap penyampaian yang sempurna dan cukup ke atas kamu, atas penampalan tujuh (7) hari selepas tarikh akhir penampalan atau pengiklanan tersebut.

Sekiranya kamu ingin untuk membantah Notis Kebankrapan tersebut, kamu hendaklah dalam tempoh tujuh (7) hari memfailkan di Mahkamah ini satu Affidavit atau Saman Dalam Kamar disokong dengan satu Affidavit bagi maksud tersebut.

Jika kamu gagal berbuat demikian satu Perisytem Pemiutang boleh ditalikan terhadap kamu.

Notis Kebankrapan ini boleh dipehatikan oleh kamu atau pemimpinan di Mahkamah ini.

Bertarikh 7 Disember 2021

-dtandatangani-

Pemelong Kanan Pendaftar
Mahkamah Tinggi Malaya
Shah Alam

NOTIS IKLAN ini ditalikan bagi pihak Pemulong Penghakiman oleh Tetuan Sidek Ikram Yong & Dennis, Peguamcara bagi pihak Pemulong Penghakiman yang beralamat di Tingkat 16, Menara Bumiputra-Commerce, No 11, Jalan Raja Laut, 50350 Kuala Lumpur. (Ruj.: E2636.0310130421JCS/TMH-sz-sg)

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR
IN THE FEDERAL TERRITORY OF KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA
COMPANIES (WINDING-UP) NO. WA-28NCC-915-12/2021

In the matter of Section 465 (1)(e) & (h) and Section 466(1)(a) & (c) of the Companies Act 2016;
And
In the matter of **TEKAT MAJU SDN. BHD. (Company No.: 200701042090 (808122-H))**

BETWEEN

TEE CHONG CHIN
(NRIC No.: 470824-10-5275) ...PETITIONER

AND

TEKAT MAJU SDN. BHD.
(Company No.: 200701042090 (808122-H)) ...RESPONDENT

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

Notice is hereby given that a Petition for the Winding-Up of the abovenamed Respondent Company by the High Court, was on the 14th December 2021 presented by Tee Chong Chin and that the said Petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at Kuala Lumpur, at 9.00 o'clock in the forenoon, on the 12th April 2022; and any creditor or contributory of the said Respondent Company desiring to support or oppose the making of an Order on the said Petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his Counsel for that purpose; and a copy of the said Petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributory of the said Respondent Company requiring the same by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

The Petitioner's address is No.21, Jalan Kelab Golf 13/8, Seksyen 13, 40100 Shah Alam, Selangor.

The Petitioner's solicitors are Messrs Skrine, Unit No. 50-8-1, 8th Floor, Wisma UOA Damansara, 50, Jalan Dungun, Damansara Heights, 50490 Kuala Lumpur.

Sgd. SKRINE
Solicitors for the Petitioner.

NOTE:-
Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition must serve on or send by post to the abovenamed Skrine, notice in writing of his intention to do so. The Notice must state the name and address of the person, or if a firm, the name and address of the firm, and must be signed by the person or firm of his or their solicitor (if any) and must be served or if posted must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the abovenamed not later than twelve o'clock noon of the 11th April 2022. (Ref: SIE/JLP/Madhuri/22103134) (Tel No: 2081 3999) (Fax No: 2094 3211)

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR
(COMMERCIAL DIVISION)
COMPANIES (WINDING-UP) NO. WA - 28NCC - 915 - 12/2021

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Couple on cloud nine

An assistant superintendent of police and his wife, both from the Penang state contingent headquarters' Criminal Investigation Department, are among 73 officers to receive certificates of appreciation for their dedication and excellent work. >2

Getting ready for school

Shop assistant Anna Cheah (left) watching Mih Mashitah Ahmad, (right) 40, help her son Muhammad Wan Muaz Mohd Zamri, 14, try on a new pair of school shoes at a shop in George Town. – ZHAFARAN NASIB/ The Star >2

Penang

Jade Emperor's birthday celebration cancelled to observe public safety >4

Selangor

PJ folk thankful for chance to shop in upgraded markets while adhering to stricter SOP >8

ASP Nurirwan Shah is delighted with the appreciation certificates that he and his wife Insp Raja Faizil received.

Comm Mohd Shuhaily inspecting the guard of honour during the oath-taking ceremony at the monthly police gathering at the Penang Police Federal Reserve Unit 3 in Ayer Itam, Penang. — ZHAFARAN NASIB/The Star

Proud moment for partners against crime

Couple among 73 cops honoured for their exemplary service

By IMRAN HILMY
imran@thestar.com.my

IT was a proud moment for some 73 police personnel and officers in Penang who received appreciation certificates for their dedication and excellence while performing their duty in the force.

Among the recipients was a husband-and-wife couple who are both officers in the state police contingent headquarters' Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

ASP Nurirwan Shah Bol Hassan, 40, said it was an honour for him to receive the certificate together with his wife Insp Raja Faizil Raja Aris during the ceremony.

"I feel grateful to be among the recipients of the certificate and the joy is doubled as my wife received it too," he said.

ASP Nurirwan said working as a police officer in the CID was highly challenging and required extra commitment in fulfilling his duties.

"Late nights, unpredictable operations and tough assignments are part and parcel of a CID officer's duties in solving crime.

"As police officers, we are always on call and we have to somehow juggle between work and family commitments," he said.

His wife Insp Raja Faizil, 39, said their work commitment as police officers would always be their first priority.

"Although our work demands our utmost priority, we have to be able to look after our family too.

"My husband and I will take turns to look after our four children aged six to 11 years old.

"If both of us have to be on duty, we will have to send all our children to a babysitter," she said.

When asked what advice she would give to young police officers who want to start a family, Insp Raja Faizil said they should know that sacrifice was important in the life of a police officer.

"They must know how to juggle both their professional and personal lives," she added.

This was not the first time the couple were receiving the certificate as they had received several in previous years.

State police chief Comm Datuk Mohd Shuhaily Mohd Zain presented the certificates to the recipients for their excellent work at the state police contingent's monthly assembly and pledge of oath at the Penang Federal Reserve Unit base in Jalan Padang Tembak yesterday.

Present during the ceremony were state deputy police chief Deputy Comm Datuk Fisol Salleh, state CID chief SAC Rahimi Ra'ais, state police contingent headquarters' management department chief ACP Muhamad Halim Yatim, Unit 3 FRU commanding officer Supt Shi Tian Aik, state police heads of department and district OCPDs.

Omicron fear affects sales of back-to-school items

By LO TERN CHERN
andylo@thestar.com.my

PARENTS are not ready to spend on back-to-school items due to uncertainties created by the Omicron wave although it is only a few days before school reopens on Monday.

Lee Sin Merchant store owner Lee Seng Bee, 70, said parents were now cautious about buying new schooling items as they were afraid that schools might have to close again.

"Some of the school uniforms that they bought last year were not even worn by their kids because schools had to close.

"Many dare not buy because they want to avoid wasting their time and money in the event that schools close again.

"This time, that was no crowd coming in to purchase uniforms or stationery items as many had shopped for them last year, while the rest are still waiting to see what happens.

"Before Covid-19, my shop would be full of people trying out the items before school reopens," he said.

Lee, who took over the family business that started over 60 years ago, said business had dropped by over 80% due to the pandemic.

"Schooling supplies, which make up 60% of my sales, have reduced significantly.

"Parents usually buy about four sets of uniforms for their children but are now taking only two sets.

"Some just take over from their seniors as their uniforms were hardly worn and are still in good condition," he said.

Jamilah Manap, 45, whose two daughters are in Years Four and Six, said she had prepared most of the items needed for school since last year.

"If another lockdown or school closure is imposed again, it will be another round of headache for us.

"We would have to find a caretaker to look after my children as both my husband and I are working.

"We hope safety measures are all in place and our children can resume schooling like normal again," she said.

Housewife Michelle Wee, 35, said although she was concerned about her daughter returning to school, there was not much that she could do about the situation.

"We are already visiting shopping malls, while my husband is working every day at his company. I also go to the market and am resuming my activities.

"As long as everybody stays responsible and the healthcare system is ready, I think physical schooling is healthier for children than studying virtually at home," said Wee, whose daughter is in Year Three.

The third term of the 2021/2022 school session will begin on Jan 9 following a week-long postponement due to the floods.

Shop assistant Anna Cheah (right) looking at Mih Mashitah Ahmad, 40, helping her son Muhammad Wan Muaz Mohd Zamri, 14, choose school uniform at a shop in George Town.

Lee (right) and his wife Lim Poh Cheoh, 65, arranging the school bags and shoes in their shop in Lebuh Noordin, Penang.

The term was initially scheduled to start on Jan 2 for schools in Group A states and Jan 3 for those in Group B states and end on March 20 for both groups.

Group A refers to Johor, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu, while Group B comprises Selangor, Melaka, Negri Sembilan, Pahang, Perak, Perlis, Penang, Sabah, Sarawak, and the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya.

Education Minister Datuk Dr Radzi Jidin had reportedly said the term would start on Jan 9 for schools in Group A states while schools in Group B states would resume classes on Jan 10.

He had said the ministry decided to postpone the resumption of the term after taking into consideration the country's current flood situation which had affected teachers, students and parents, directly or indirectly, as well as schools that were either affected badly or used as relief centres.

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A quiet Hokkien New Year again

Jade Emperor's birthday bash cancelled for second year due to pandemic

By N. TRISHA
trishang@thestar.com.my

Chew Jetty Association secretary Chew Beng Hing showing one of the restored items at the Chau Yuan Gong Temple. — CHAN BOON KAI/The Star

FOR the second year in a row, the Thnee Kong Seh's (Jade Emperor) birthday celebration at Chew Jetty in George Town is called off.

What in previous years were grand feasts, jaw-dropping lion dance performances as well as elaborate offerings to the Chinese king of heaven, much to the delight of over 10,000 locals and visitors, will once again be a private affair for Hokkien families.

Pengkalan Kota assemblyman Daniel Gooi said the decision was made by the Chew Jetty Association after discussing it with the state government.

"We have to cancel the celebration again as there is the fear of a Covid-19 cluster arising from it.

"We are worried that due to the large crowd, there will be no compliance of the standard operating procedures for religious celebrations.

"The event would have been too large to handle," he said at the Chau Yuan Gong Temple in Chew Jetty, Weld Quay, Penang, yesterday.

Gooi said it was a difficult decision but it was to ensure the health and safety of attendees as well as the 74 families living at Chew Jetty.

The celebration starts on the night of the eighth day of Chinese New Year. The following day is deemed to be Jade Emperor's birthday and is also regarded as the Hokkien New Year.

In the past, a 60m-long altar would be laid out on the road and thousands of people would fill it with food offerings.

Many cultural performances were also held, including a dramatic, death-defying lion dance show on tall stilts.

On a separate note, Gooi said restoration works on the 117-year-old Chau Yuan Gong Temple which began in 2020, was completed in accordance with heritage conservation guidelines, since the temple is in the heart of the George Town Unesco World Heritage Site.

"It cost RM2.5mil to restore the temple, with majority of the donations raised by the community.

"Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow donated RM200,000 in his capacity as Tanjong MP, while the state contributed RM50,000 through its non-Islamic places of worship fund," he said.

(From left) Gooi having a discussion with Choon Seng (in black) and Beng Hing outside the temple.

Gooi (in white) looking at the restored work in the temple. With him are Chew Jetty committee chairman Chew Choon Seng (in black) and Beng Hing.

The restored main door at the Chau Yuan Gong Temple in Chew Jetty, George Town.

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DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI SHAH ALAM
DALAM NEGERI SELANGOR DARUL EHSAN
DALAM KEBANKRAPAN NO : BA-29NCC-2168-10/2021

BER : CHAN CHUEN PODI (NO. K/P: 680610-10-5040) ...PENGHUTANG
EX-PARTE: CIMB ISLAMIC BANK BERHAD (NO. SYARIKAT: 200401032872 (671380-H)) ...PEMIUTANG
...PENGHAKIMAN

NOTIS IKLAN

Kepada :-

CHAN CHUEN PODI
13-13-1, Garden Park Condo
Sg Long
43000 Kajang
Selangor Darul Ehsan
Dan
CHAN CHUEN PODI
No. 18, Jalan S/L 7/4
Bandar Sungai Long
Batu 11 ½ Cheras
43200 Kajang
Selangor Darul Ehsan

AMBIL PERHATIAN bahawa suatu Notis Kebankrapan dikeluarkan terhadap kamu dan Mahkamah Tinggi Shah Alam oleh CIMB ISLAMIC BANK BERHAD (No. Syarikat : 200401032872 (671380-H)) yang memunyai alamat di Level 23A, Menara CIMB, No. 1, Jalan Stesen Sentral 2, 50470 Kuala Lumpur dan Mahkamah telah memerintahkan bahawa Notis Kebankrapan tersebut diserahkan kepada kamu secara Penyampaian Ganti dengan menampalkan sesalinan Notis Kebankrapan tersebut bersama sesalinan Perintah Penyampaian Ganti di alamat terakhir kamu yang diketahui iaitu di D-13-1, Garden Park Condo, Sg Long, 43000 Kajang Selangor Darul Ehsan dan di No. 18, Jalan S/L 7/4, Bandar Sungai Long, Batu 11 ½ Cheras, 43200 Kajang Selangor Darul Ehsan, menampakkannya di papan kenyataan Mahkamah Tinggi Shah Alam serta mengiklankan satu Notis sebagi di dalam suratkhabar harian 'The Star' dari penampalan dan pengiklanan tersebut adalah dianggap penyampaian yang sempurna dan cukup ke atas kamu atas pembatalan tujuh (7) hari selepas tarikh akhir penampalan atau pengiklanan tersebut.

Sekiranya kamu ingin untuk membatalkan Notis Kebankrapan tersebut, kamu hendaklah dalam tempoh tujuh (7) hari memfailkan di Mahkamah ini satu Afidavit atau Saman Dalam Kantai disokong dengan satu Afidavit bagi maksud tersebut.

Jika kamu gagal berbuat demikian satu Petsyen Pemiutang boleh di failkan terhadap kamu.

Notis Kebankrapan ini boleh dipenksa oleh kamu atas permintaan di Mahkamah ini.

Bertarikh 7 Disember 2021
-ditandatangani-

Penolong Kanan Pendaftar
Mahkamah Tinggi Malaya
Shah Alam

NOTIS IKLAN ini dikeluar bagi pihak Pemutang Penghakiman oleh tetuan Edeh Teoh Wong & Dennis, Peguamcara bagi pihak Pemiutang Penghakiman yang beralamat di Tingkat 16, Menara Bumiputra-Commerce, No 11, Jalan Raja Laut, 50350 Kuala Lumpur. [Ruj : E2030.031013044421JCS/TNH-az-ag]

Court Notices

DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI SHAH ALAM
DALAM NEGERI SELANGOR DARUL EHSAN, MALAYSIA
(BAHAGIAN KEBANKRAPAN)
DALAM KEBANKRAPAN NO. : BA-29NCC-2252-11/2021

Perkara :SUFIAN BIN KAMARUDDIN @ ARIFFIN
(NO. K/P: 820927-03-5143) ...PENGHUTANG PENGHAKIMAN
Ex-Parte :BMW CREDIT (MALAYSIA) SDN BHD
[dahulunya dikenali sebagai SmeCredit (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd]
(NO. SYARIKAT: 75342-D) ...PEMIUTANG PENGHAKIMAN

NOTIS

Kepada:
SUFIAN BIN KAMARUDDIN @ ARIFFIN
No 3, Jalan PJU 3/12C,
Damansara Indah,
47410 Petaling Jaya, Selangor

AMBIL PERHATIAN bahawa suatu Notis Kebankrapan telah dikeluarkan terhadap kamu di Mahkamah Tinggi di Shah Alam oleh BMW Credit (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd yang memunyai alamat berdaftar di Suite 7-7, Level 7, Wisma UOA Damansara II , No. 6, Jalan Changkat Semantan, Damansara Heights, 50490 Kuala Lumpur dan perniagaannya di Quill Building 3, 3501, Jalan Teknokrat 5, 63000 Cyberjaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan dan Mahkamah telah memerintahkan bahawa Notis Kebankrapan ini diserahkan kepada kamu secara penyampaian ganti dengan menampalkan sesalinan perintah dan Notis Kebankrapan ini di Papan Notis Mahkamah Tinggi Shah Alam dan di alamat terakhir kamu yang diketahui di No 3, Jalan PJU 3/12C, Damansara Indah, 47410 Petaling Jaya, Selangor dan dengan mengiklankan satu Notis sesali di dalam akhbar tempatan bernama "The Star" dan penampalan dan pengiklanan tersebut, hendaklah dianggap penyampaian sempurna dan cukup ke atas kamu tujuh hari (7) hari selepas tarikh akhir penampalan atau pengiklanan tersebut.

Bertarikh pada 14 Disember 2021

t.t

Penolong Kanan Pendaftar
Mahkamah Tinggi Malaya
Shah Alam

Notis ini dfailkan oleh Tetuan Lim Kian Leong & Co., Peguamcara bagi Pemiutang Penghakiman di alas dengan alamat penyampaiannya di Blok 10 6, Tingkat 10, Wisma UOA II, No.21 Jalan Pinang, 50450 Kuala Lumpur.
No. Tel : 03-21614199
No. Faks: 03-21614323
No. Ruj. Fail: 2/BG/13732

Court Notices

M A L A Y S I A
IN THE HIGH COURT IN SABAH AND SARAWAK AT KUCHING
COMPANIES (WINDING-UP) NO. KCH-28NCC-31/11-2021 (HC 3)

In the matter of Section 465(1) (e) and Section 466(1) (a) of the Companies Act 2016
AND
In the matter of **ZASBINA X.T SDN. BHD.** (Company Registration No. 201101037988 (986122-P)) having its registered address at Parent Lot 27, Ground Floor, Sublot 13, Jalan Stutong, Star Point Angle Commercial Centre, 93350 Kuching, Sarawak.

BETWEEN

STARKEN AAC SDN. BHD. (Company Registration No. 200601032244 (752003-D)) Suite 10.02, Level 10, The Gardens South Tower, Mid Valley City, Lingkaran Syed Putra, 59200 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. ...Petitioner

AND

ZASBINA X.T SDN. BHD. (Company Registration No. 201101037988 (986122-P)) Parent Lot 27, Ground Floor, Sublot 13, Jalan Stutong, Star Point Angle Commercial Centre, 93350 Kuching, Sarawak. ...Respondent

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

[Rule 24 of the Companies (Winding-Up) Rules 1972]

NOTICE is hereby given that a Petition for the Winding-Up of the above-named Respondent company, **ZASBINA X.T SDN. BHD. (Company Registration No. 201101037988 (986122-P))** by the High Court was on the **10th day of November 2021** presented by the above-named Petitioner, **STARKEN AAC SDN. BHD. (Company Registration No. 200601032244 (752003-D))** AND that the said Petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at **Kuching** at **9.00 a.m.**, on **Wednesday, the 26th day of January 2022** and any creditor or contributory of the above-named Respondent Company desiring to support or oppose the making of an Order on the said Petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his counsel for that purpose and a copy of the Petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributory of the above-named Respondent Company requiring the same by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

The Petitioner is **STARKEN AAC SDN. BHD. (Company Registration No. 200601032244 (752003-D))** and the Petitioner's registered address at Suite 10.02, Level 10, The Gardens South Tower, Mid Valley City, Lingkaran Syed Putra, 59200 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and having a place of business A-1-3A, Pusat Perdagangan Kuchai, No.2, Jalan 1/127, Off Jalan Kuchai Lama, 58200 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan.

The Petitioner's advocates is **Messrs. S. K. Ling & Tan Advocates (Kuching)** of C355 to C359, 2nd Floor, Block C, Ipom Square, Jalan Pending, 93450 Kuching, Sarawak.

Dated this 23rd day of December, 2021

[signed]

Messrs. S. K. Ling & Tan Advocates (Kuching)
Advocates for the Petitioner

NOTE :-
Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition, either to oppose or support, must serve on or sent by post to the above-named Messrs. S. K. Ling & Tan Advocates (Kuching) notice in writing of his intention so to do. The notice must state the name and address of the person, or if a firm, the name and address of the firm, and must be signed by the person or firm, or his or their solicitor (if any) and must be served, or if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the above-named Messrs. S. K. Ling & Tan Advocates (Kuching) not later than twelve o'clock noon of the **25th day of January 2022.**

Court Notices

DALAM MAHKAMAH MAJISTRET DI JOHOR BAHRU
GUAMAN SIVIL NO.: JA-A72NCC-822-11/2021

ANTARA

SME POWER SYSTEM SDN BHD (NO. SYARIKAT: 201601032933 (1203874-W)) ...PLAINTIF

DAN

LYE KOK HONG (NO. K/P: 640410-01-5199) BERNIAGA SEBAGAI "U-SHI POWER ENGINEERING" (NO. PENDAFTARAN PERNIAGAAN: 2007031772047 (0071172890-V)) ...DEFENDAN

PENYAMPAIAN GANTI-BENTUK IKLAN

Kepada:-

LYE KOK HONG (NO. K/P: 640410-01-5199)
T/A U-SHI POWER ENGINEERING
No. 61, Jalan Teratai 7
Taman Johor Jaya
81100 Johor Bahru, Johor
Dan/atau
LYE KOK HONG (NO. K/P: 640410-01-5199)
T/A U-SHI POWER ENGINEERING
No. 14, Jalan Danau 25
Taman Desa Jaya
81100 Johor Bahru, Johor

AMBIL PERHATIAN BAHAWA suatu tindakan Writ dan Pernyataan Tuntutan telah dimulakan terhadap kamu di Mahkamah Majistret Johor Bahru di Johor dalam Guaman Sivil No JA-A72NCC-822-11/2021 oleh SME Power System Sdn Bhd beralamat di No. 2, Jalan Solaten 3/2, Taman Perindustrian Ringan Pulai, 81300 Skudai, Johor yang mana tuntutan Plaintif ialah untuk jumlah sebanyak **RM27,078.70** berserta faedah pada kadar 5% setahun ke atas jumlah yang terhunggis dari tarikh Penyataan Tuntutan ini sehingga tarikh pembayaran dan penyelesaian sepenuhnya bersarta kos tindakan ini.

DAN TELAH DIPERINTAHKAN bahawa penyampaian Writ dan Pernyataan Tuntutan kepada kamu adalah dengan menyiarkan Writ dan Pernyataan Tuntutan dan Perintah yang dibuat ini di Papan Kenyataan Mahkamah Majistret, Johor Bahru dan mengiklankannya di dalam akhbar 'THE STAR' yang diterbitkan di seluruh negara dan dipernikahkan bahawa penyampaian secara penampalan dan pengiklanan tersebut adalah sempurna dan berkesan untuk Writ dan Pernyataan Tuntutan kepada kamu selepas empat belas (14) hari selepas tarikh terakhir penampalan dan pengiklanan tersebut;

Jika kamu berhasrat untuk membela tindakan tersebut kamu mestilah hadir sama ada secara sendiri atau melalui peguambela kamu di hadapan Mahkamah Majistret di Johor Bahru pada **27.01.2022** pada pukul **9.00 pagi.** Jika kamu ingkar hadir sedemikian, penghakiman boleh diberikan terhadap kamu.

Bertarikh pada 30hb Disember, 2021

t/t

DENNIS NIK & WONG
Peguamcara bagi Plaintif

Penyampaian Ganti-Bentuk Iklan ini dikeluarkan oleh Tetuan Dennis Nik & Wong beralamat di Suite 801-602, Level 6, Bangunan ANG, No. 1, Jalan Jeram, Taman Tasek, 80200 Johor Bahru, Johor. Peguamcara bagi Plaintif di atas.
[Ruj. Kami: LLM/ilyat/GL560*1]

Court Notices

DALAM MAHKAMAH MAJISTRET DI JOHOR BAHRU
GUAMAN NO: JA-A72NCC-890-11/2021

ANTARA

GREAT EASTERN LIFE ASSURANCE (MALAYSIA) BERHAD (No. Syarikat: 93745-A) ...PLAINTIF

DAN

JOHN KENNEDY A/L SANTIAVO (NO. K/P: 740926-08-5081) ...DEFENDAN

PENYAMPAIAN GANTI - BENTUK IKLAN

Kepada :

JOHN KENNEDY A/L SANTIAVO
No. 3, Jalan Bukit Kempas 4/14
Taman Bukit Kempas
81200 Johor Bahru
Johor

AMBIL PERHATIAN bahawa suatu tindakan telah dimulakan terhadap kamu di Mahkamah Majistret di Johor Bahru Guaman No JA-A72NCC-890-11/2021 oleh Great Eastern Life Assurance (Malaysia) Berhad yang mempunyai alamat berdaftar dan perniagaannya di Menara Great Eastern, No. 303, Jalan Ampang, 50450 Kuala Lumpur untuk jumlah RM19,567-47 dan bersiah pada kadar 5% setahun ke atas jumlah RM19,567-47 dari 04/10/2021 sehingga penyelesaian sepenuhnya.

Dan adalah diperintahkan bahawa penyampaian writ dalam tindakan ini kepada kamu kena dilaksanakan melalui iklan ini. Jika kamu berhasrat untuk membela tindakan ini kamu hendaklah dalam tempoh 28 hari dari tarikh pengiklanan notis ini termasuk hari pengiklanan, memasukkan kehadiran di Pendaftar Mahkamah. Jika kamu ingkar memasukkan kehadiran, penghakiman boleh diberikan terhadap kamu.

Bertarikh pada 19 Disember 2021

t.t.

WONG LU PEEN & TUNKU ALINA
Peguam cara bagi pihak Plaintif

Penyampaian Ganti-Bentuk Iklan ini dikeluarkan oleh WONG LU PEEN & TUNKU ALINA, peguam cara bagi pihak Plaintif yang beralamat di 21-6, Block B, The Boulevard, Mid Valley City, Lingkaran Syed Putra, 59200 Kuala Lumpur.
Rujukan Fail: LJ 15835
Tel: 03-29388333 Fax: 03-29388811
Emel: general@alpha.com.my

Court Notices

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR
(COMMERCIAL DIVISION)
COMPANIES (WINDING UP) PETITION NO. WA - 28NCC - 822 - 11/2021

In the matter of Telcom Trader Limited (Company No. LL11252)
And
In the matter of Section 131 of the Labuan Companies Act 1990 and Section 465(1)(e) of the Companies Act 2016
And
In the matter of Companies (Winding-Up) Rules 1972
BETWEEN

VOVIDA Fast Pay Limited (Company No. 12095656) ...Petitioner

AND

Telcom Trader Limited (Company No. LL11252) ...Respondent

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

Notice is hereby given that a Petition for the Winding-Up of Telcom Trader Limited (Company No. LL11252) ("Company") by the High Court, was on the 15th day of November 2021 presented by VOVIDA Fast Pay Limited of Interpark House, 7 Down Street, London, W1J 7AJ, United Kingdom. And that the said Petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at Kuala Lumpur, at 9.00 o'clock in the forenoon, on the 15th day of March 2022; and any creditor or contributory of the said Company desiring to support or oppose the making of an Order on the said Petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his Counsel for that purpose; and a copy of the said Petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributory of the said Respondent Company requiring the same by the under-signed on payment of regulated charge for the same.

The Petitioner's address is Quill Building 3, 3501, Jalan Teknokrat 5, 63000 Cyberjaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan.
The Petitioner's solicitors are Messrs Skrine, Unit No. 50-8-1, 8th Floor, Wisma UOA Damansara, 50, Jalan Dungun, Damansara Heights, 50490 Kuala Lumpur.

Sgd: SKRINE
Solicitors for the Petitioner

NOTE:-
Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition must serve on or send by post to the above-named Skrine, notice in writing of his intention to do so. This Notice must state the name and address of the person, or if a firm, the name and address of the firm, and must be signed by the person or firm, or his or their Solicitors (if any) and must be served, or if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the above-named not later than twelve o'clock noon of the 11th April 2022. [Ref: SIE/JLP/Madhuri/22103134] (Tel No: 2081 3999) (Fax No: 2094 3211)

Court Notices

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR
IN THE FEDERAL TERRITORY OF KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA
COMPANIES (WINDING-UP) NO. WA-28NCC-913-12/2021

In the matter of Section 465 (1)(e) & (h) and Section 466(1)(a) & (c) of the Companies Act 2016;
And
In the matter of **TEKAT MAJU SDN. BHD. (Company No.: 200701042090 (800122-H))**
BETWEEN

TEE CHONG CHIN (NRIC No.: 470824-10-5275) ...PETITIONER

AND

TEKAT MAJU SDN. BHD. (Company No.: 200701042090 (800122-H)) ...RESPONDENT

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

Notice is hereby given that a Petition for the Winding-Up of the abovenamed Respondent Company by the High Court, was on the 14th December 2021 presented by Tee Chong Chin and that the said Petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at Kuala Lumpur, at 9.00 o'clock in the forenoon, on the 12th April 2022 and any creditor or contributory of the said Respondent Company desiring to support or oppose the making of an Order on the said Petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his Counsel for that purpose; and a copy of the said Petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributory of the said Respondent Company requiring the same by the under-signed on payment of regulated charge for the same.
The Petitioner's address is No.21, Jalan Kelab Golf 13/8, Seksyen 13, 40100 Shah Alam, Selangor.
The Petitioner's solicitors are Messrs Skrine, Unit No. 50-8-1, 8th Floor, Wisma UOA Damansara, 50, Jalan Dungun, Damansara Heights, 50490 Kuala Lumpur.

Sgd: SKRINE
Solicitors for the Petitioner

NOTE:-
Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition must serve on or send by post to the abovenamed Skrine, notice in writing of his intention to do so. This Notice must state the name and address of the person, or if a firm, the name and address of the firm, and must be signed by the person or firm, or his or their Solicitors (if any) and must be served, or if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the abovenamed not later than twelve o'clock noon of the 11th April 2022. [Ref: SIE/JLP/Madhuri/22103134] (Tel No: 2081 3999) (Fax No: 2094 3211)

Court Notices

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT SHAH ALAM
IN THE STATE OF SELANGOR DARUL EHSAN, MALAYSIA
COMPANIES (WINDING-UP) NO. BA - 28NCC - 621-12/2021

In the matter of Section 465 (1)(e) & (h) and Section 466(1)(a) & (c) of the Companies Act 2016;
And
In the matter of **SNOGURT SDN. BHD. [Registration No.: 201001026602 (919521-A)]:**
BETWEEN

BMW CREDIT (MALAYSIA) SDN. BHD. (Registration No.: 198101000255) ...PETITIONER

AND

SNOGURT SDN. BHD. (Registration No.: 201001026602 (919521-A)) ...RESPONDENT

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

Notice is hereby given that a Petition for the Winding-Up of the abovenamed Respondent Company by the High Court, was on the 13th December 2021 presented by BMW Credit (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd and that the said Petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at Shah Alam, at 9.00 o'clock in the forenoon, on the 8th March 2022; and any creditor or contributory of the said Respondent Company desiring to support or oppose the making of an Order on the said Petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his Counsel for that purpose; and a copy of the said Petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributory of the said Respondent Company requiring the same by the under-signed on payment of regulated charge for the same.
The Petitioner's address is Quill Building 3, 3501, Jalan Teknokrat 5, 63000 Cyberjaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan.
The Petitioner's solicitors are Messrs Skrine, Unit No. 50-8-1, 8th Floor, Wisma UOA Damansara, 50, Jalan Dungun, Damansara Heights, 50490 Kuala Lumpur.

Sgd: SKRINE
Solicitors for the Petitioner

NOTE:-
Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition must serve on or send by post to the abovenamed Skrine, notice in writing of his intention to do so. The Notice must state the name and address of the person, or if a firm, the name and address of the firm, and must be signed by the person or firm, or his or their Solicitors (if any) and must be served, or if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the abovenamed not later than twelve o'clock noon of the 7th March 2022. [Ref: KPY/LKL/Ajablan/22112988] (Tel No: 2081 3999) (Fax No: 2094 3211)

Court Notices

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT PENANG
COMPANIES (WINDING-UP) NO: PA-28NCC-121-12/2021

In the matter of Section 466(1)(a) of the Companies Act, 2016
And
In the matter of Small Venture Sdn Bhd
Between

Affin Bank Berhad (Company No: 25048-T) ...Petitioner

And

Small Venture Sdn Bhd (Company No. 1063854-H) ...Respondent

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

NOTICE is hereby given that a petition for the winding-up of the abovenamed Respondent Company by the High Court was, on the 1/12/2021 presented by the said abovenamed Petitioner; and that the said petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at Penang at 9.00 a.m on 11/02/2021 and any creditor or contributory of the said Respondent Company desiring to support or oppose the making of an order on the said petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his counsel for that purpose; and a copy of the petition will be furnished to any Creditor or contributory of the said Respondent Company which require the same from the Petitioner's solicitors with payment of the regulated charge for the same.
The Petitioner's address is at 7th Floor, Menara Affin, No. 80, Jalan Cheda, 30200 Kuala Lumpur.
The Petitioner's solicitors are M/s Anuzi & Foong at Level 5, Tamarins House, No. 46, Weld Quay, 10300 Penang.

sgd

Solicitors for the Petitioner

NOTE :-
Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said petition must serve on or send by post to the above-named Solicitors for the Petitioner notice in writing of his intention so to do. The notice must state the name and address of the person, or if a firm, the name and address of the firm, and must be signed by the person or firm, or his or their solicitors (if any) and must be served or, if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the above-named solicitors not later than twelve o'clock noon of 10/02/2022 (Thursday).

Court Notices

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR
(COMMERCIAL DIVISION)
COMPANIES WINDING-UP NO. WA - 28NCC - 918 - 12/2021

IN THE MATTER OF SECTION 465(1)(e) & 465(1)(a) OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016
AND
IN THE MATTER OF DASAR JATI SDN BHD
[Company No. 199401029526 (315207-X)]
BETWEEN

AMBANK (M) BERHAD [Company No. 196901000166 (8515-D)] ...PETITIONER

AND

DASAR JATI SDN BHD [Company No. 199401029526 (315207-X)] ...RESPONDENT

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

NOTICE is hereby given that a Petition for the Winding-Up of the abovenamed Company by the High Court was on the **20th day of December 2021** presented by AmBank (M) Berhad and that the said Petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at Kuala Lumpur at 9.00 o'clock in the forenoon, on the **12th day of April 2022** and any creditor or contributory of the said Company desiring to support or oppose the making of an order on the said Petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his counsel for that purpose; and a copy of the petition will be furnished to any Creditor or contributory of the said Respondent Company requiring the same by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.
The Petitioners' address is at Helley Hassan, Tan & Partners, Advocates & Solicitors, Unit No. A-3A-4, Megan Avenue 1, No. 189, Jalan Tun Razak, 50400 Kuala Lumpur.
NOTE:-Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition must serve on or send by post to the abovenamed Helley Hassan, Tan & Partners, notice in writing of his intention to do so. The notice must state the name and address of the person, or if a firm, the name and address of the firm and must be signed by the person or firm of his or their solicitor (if any) and must be served or, if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the abovenamed, not later than **12 noon of Monday the 11th day of April 2022.**
(Ref: TTK/ABB/67/2019/2)

Keeping Petaling Jaya ticking

City's businesses slowly recover from pandemic as new mayor takes charge

YEARENDER 2021

By SHEILA SRI PRIYA
sheilasripriya@thestar.com.my

WHEN year 2021 kicked off, Covid-19 cases started rising around the country once again.

However, the announcement on the roll-out of mass vaccinations, which gathered steam mid-year, helped provide a glimmer of hope to Petaling Jaya folk who were tired of a neverending cycle of movement control orders, and provide a boost for businesses that has been struggling with the pandemic.

Targeted aid from the federal and state governments, as well as temporary permits given out to traders in certain areas in Petaling Jaya, also acted as a stimulus for those affected by the pandemic.

Mohamad Azhan, the sixth Petaling Jaya mayor, took on the role beginning Oct 21.

Mentari Court residents getting their vaccination following an outbreak of Covid-19 cases in July.

Pasar Sentosa in Section 17 now has large murals painted over the walls. The visual consists of eight selected main markets around Petaling Jaya.

Thousands of pet lovers and park users signed an online petition to retain the dog park at Central Park in Bandar Utama.

Immunisation programme

The mass vaccination programme for residents in areas under enhanced MCO in Selangor was first introduced in Petaling Jaya.

In July, above-18 residents of Mentari Court, regardless of their nationality and status of documentation, were vaccinated.

Mentari Court has more than 17,000 residents in 3,469 units.

At the height of the pandemic, there were over 500 positive cases at the apartment blocks.

In the more seasoned areas such as Petaling Jaya Old Town, where many senior care homes were located, there were calls for authorities to vaccinate the elderly and their caretakers.

This was quickly done, and authorities assisted by vaccine support volunteers also visited othercare homes and those out-of-the-way areas in the district to ease the vaccination process.

In the meantime, Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) in October rolled out a more compassionate approach towards the city's stakeholders and offered a waiver for assessment tax or a rebate to owners of business premises whose tenants moved out during the pandemic.

Petaling Jaya acting deputy mayor Sharipah Marhaini Syed Ali said MBPJ would also waive rental due in June and July for businesses operating from council premises, to ease the burden of operators.

The council also offered temporary permits to 802 traders in Petaling Jaya, including 41 operating along Jalan PJS 2D/1 in Taman Medan. The permits are for a three-month period, to be renewed on a monthly basis.

Not in alignment

News about a proposed plan for an underground Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) 3 Circle Line running through certain parts of Petaling Jaya proved unsettling to residents, business owners and environmental activists.

The stakeholders learned about the proposed plan after MRT Corp gave them an online presentation in August.

In an April 14 article, *The Star* reported that a third MRT line would play a crucial role in cutting short the distance for those who need to transfer between MRT lines (Kajang and the upcoming Putrajaya line) and LRT lines (Kelana Jaya and Ampang/Sri Petaling) as well as the KTMB Komuter.

Representatives of the Section 5 Residents Association (RA5PJ), Section 10 Residents Association (S10RA), Gasing Coalition (comprising 12 residents groups from the Bukit Gasing and Friends of Bukit Gasing (FOBG) were among those consulted by MRT Corp.

In response to protests by nearby residents, the company reiterated that the alignment had yet to be finalised, with Bukit Gasing assemblyman Rajiv Rishyakaran stating that the proposal had not yet gone through the required public display and government approval processes.

Rajiv also said there were three different proposed MRT3 alignments since 2016.

The first version only passes Jalan Universiti, while the second and third proposals pass through Jalan Gasing and Jalan Universiti using different alignments and coming from different directions from the Kuala Lumpur side.

New mayor at the helm

The year saw a new mayor for Petaling Jaya, with Mohamad Azhan Md Amir assuming the role effective Oct 21, taking over from Datuk Mohd Sayuthi Bakar, who left in May to serve as Immigration Department deputy director-general (operations).

Mohamad Azhan previously served as the National Disaster Management Agency's (Nadma) post-disaster management division deputy director-general.

He has 24 years of experience in the civil service at state and ministry levels.

Former MBPJ director of city planning Sharipah Marhaini Syed Ali was promoted to deputy mayor.

After four long years without a director of health at MBPJ, the council's retired director of health, Dr Chitra Davi N. Vadivellu, was reappointed on a two-year contract, and will report to office next week.

Dog park closure

Pet owners who frequent the Central Park in Bandar Utama, Petaling Jaya, were upset when they saw a notice for the landowner to remove the structures erected for the dog park in October.

It said the notice was issued under the Park By-law 2005 (MBPJ 2005).

A council spokesperson said the structures were erected without MBPJ's approval.

Meanwhile, thousands of pet lovers and park users signed an online petition to retain the park.

Their area councillor Danny Chan confirmed that as of now the park was still open to pet owners and the matter would be settled amicably between the council and the landowner as many were fond of the park and there were no other dog park in the city.

Market upgrade

The city council has embarked on a project to improve the conditions at some wet markets in the city.

So far, Pasar Sentosa in Section 17 and Pasar Taman Megah in SS24 have been transformed into modern wet markets that attracted both the young and old.

The Section 17 market had beautiful murals that attracted the young who were always looking for Instagram-worthy places to visit.

The Taman Megah market was extensively renovated and now boast a wet and dry section, with high ceilings, attracting both vendors and customers.

The same could not be said for the Pasar Besar Jalan Othman, better known as the PJ Old Town Market.

It is struggling to attract customers and vendors after the council vetted the business owners there.

As a result of several lockdowns at the market due to the Covid-19 outbreak among the traders and a rodent infestation problem, the council got tough on enforcement.

Business owners who breached MBPJ rules had their licence terminated. Council rental for the lots was also readjusted.

Most business owners at the market were given new lots depending on the type of business and based on the council's new business layout.

At the SS2 market, members of the public, in September, were irked by new standard operating procedures introduced requiring them to pay RM1 (refundable) for laminated card bearing numbers given out to keep track of the number of visitors.

Marketgoers had hygiene concerns as it involved physical contact between them and the person distributing the cards.

Following protests, the system was terminated but reintroduced later.